

W. Maxwell Prince

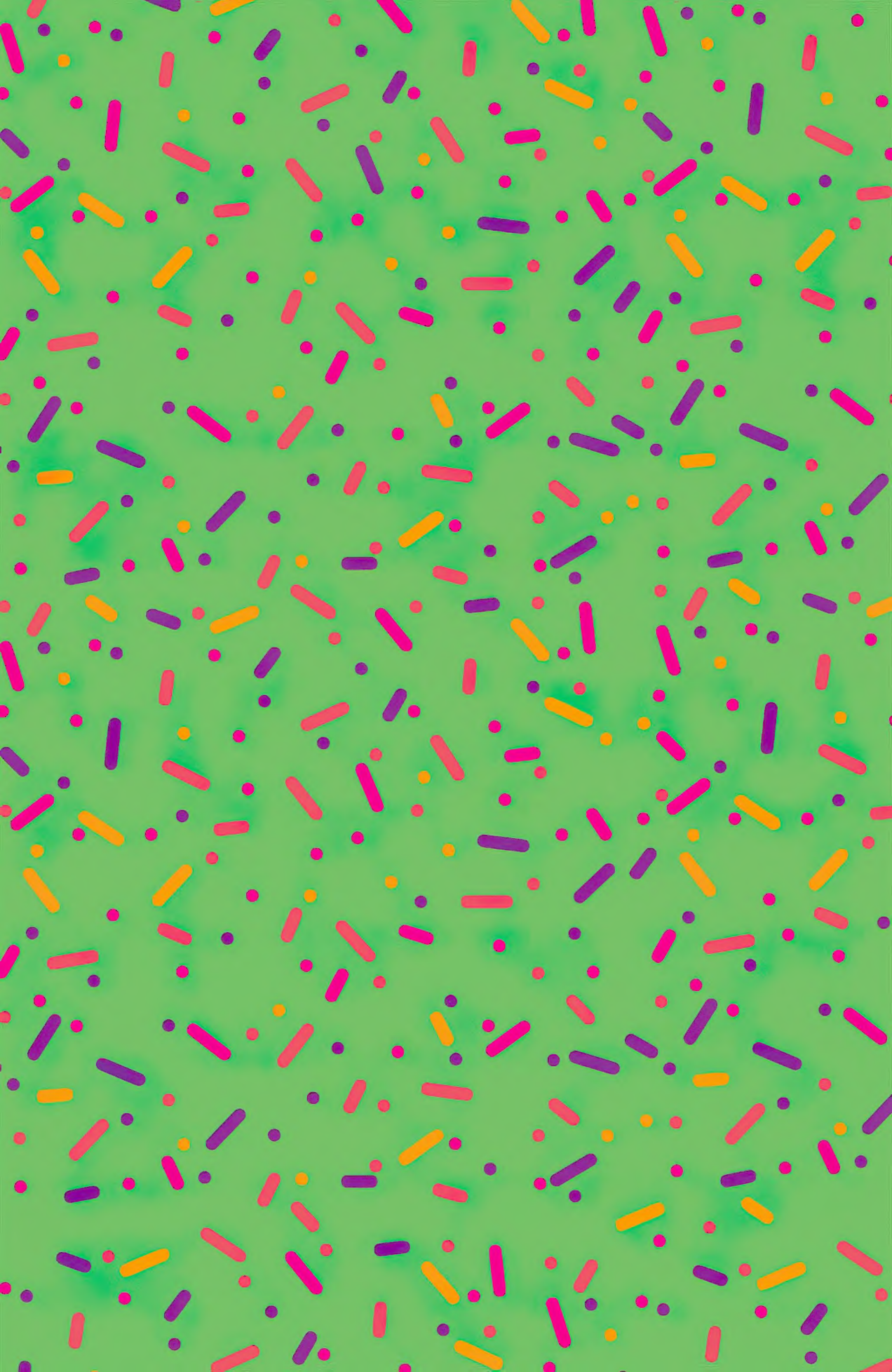
Martín Morazzo

Chris O'Halloran

volume nine

Ice Cream ManTM







VOLUME NINE

• HEAVY NARRATION •

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"We are the graceless and dumbfounded,
insane with our own insatiable desire for
another time and place."

—**David Means**, "Assorted Fire Events"



Are things getting better?
Email wmaxwellprince@gmail.com

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THE KIND OF STORY I WANT TO WRITE

CHAPTER 33





The kind of story I
want to write is light
and breezy...

Uplifting.
Full of mirth and
sunshine.



But the kind of story I
wind up writing is always
a little *different*...

The kind of story I want to write is heroic, dynamic.



Timeless, political.



Pastoral.

Hopeful.



...deeply in touch with the undeniable goodness of our weird, wild world.



But instead I write about *this* guy.



And *these* guys.



And places like *this*.



And the whole thing (the *story*...) seems just totally obsessed with the endless pain and suffering of sick, broken people...





In the kind of story I want to write, Brad wakes up to a cheerful alarm.



He pours some cereal for breakfast.



He gets dressed and leaves the house to run some errands.



But in *this* story, the one I'm writing, Brad is hungover and forgot to set the alarm...



...and he's out of Morsels®, so he's forced to begin the day (running late!) on an empty stomach.



He hurries into town (wearing *mismatched* socks, for what it's worth), feeling like absolute *shit*.



The kind of story I want to write sees Brad walking down the street, smiling at various passersby.

Morning!



He gives some change to that beggar who always sits on the corner of Smith and Bergen.



He catches an elderly woman from falling.

Oh, bless your kind soul!



He gets on the bus and makes his way to the other side of town...



In this story, though, Brad avoids eye contact with pretty much everyone...



...including the beggar (which for the beggar's part, makes him feel less than human).




...and is very nearly flattened by a falling piano that was being lofted into a third-story apartment directly overhead.



He gets on the bus (which smells like piss) and makes his way to the other side of town...








In the kind of story I want to write, Brad and Rosalita (*really*, that's her name) take a long walk around the park, getting to know each other a little.

...grew up in Ohio, but moved here for college and never left...



The kind of story I wind up writing? Brad and Brenda sit on a bench and make the most awkward attempts at small talk imaginable:

Do you like music?

Not really--I have *vertigo*, and any loud sound entering my ear canal could result in a *terrible fall*...

...and my bones are already fragile due to an iron deficiency...



Nice story: Brad and Rosalita (I'm serious, just like the Springsteen song) go on a few dates.



They text back and forth.



They have the kind of sex that leaves both partners feeling as if they'd *exited* their bodies for a few moments during the act.



This story: Brad and Brenda also go on a few dates (but the conversation doesn't exactly improve by any measure).

Travel much?

Can't fly, on account of the vertigo.




They text mostly in clipped, stilted messages.



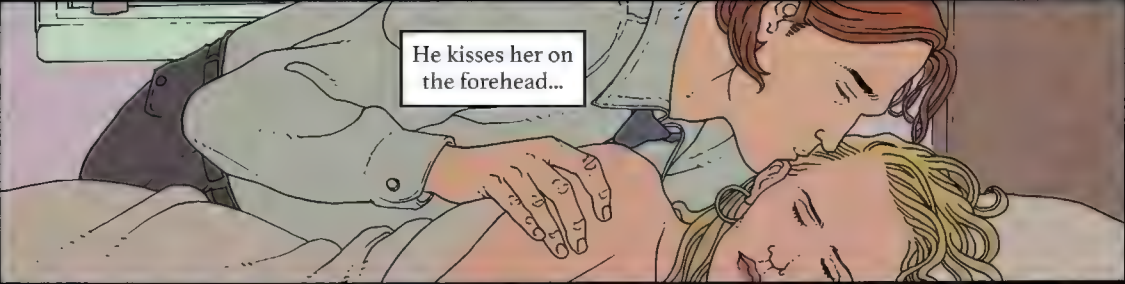
They make love, but neither Brad nor Brenda really *wants* to—

They feel *compelled* to it by some sort of unspoken Rule of Romantic Progression.


But make no mistake: neither partner is fully invested, and the consent here (from both sides) is *murky* at best.

A comic book panel showing a man with short brown hair (Brad) and a woman with long blonde hair (Rosalita) sitting on a bed in a bedroom. Brad is looking at Rosalita, who is looking down. There are flower-shaped decorations on the wall and a small potted plant on a table between them.

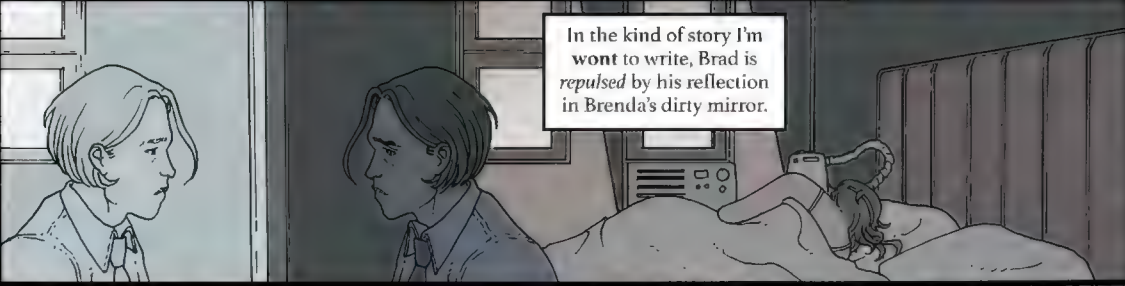
In the kind of story I want to write, Brad gets dressed in Rosalita's apartment.

A close-up comic book panel of Brad leaning over Rosalita, who is lying in bed. Brad is kissing Rosalita on the forehead, and his hand is resting on her head.

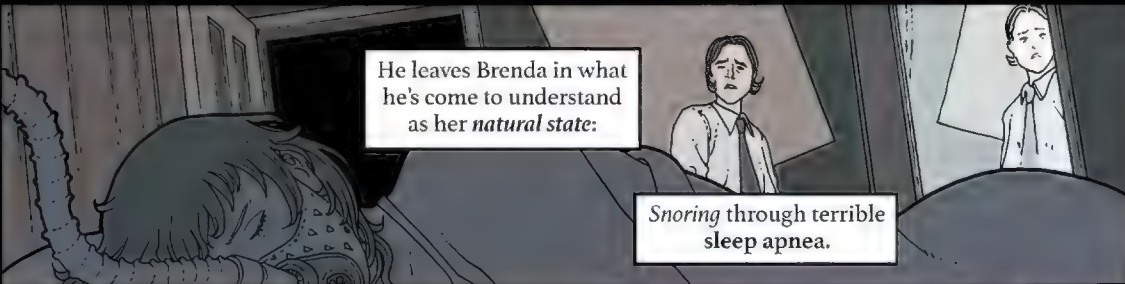
He kisses her on the forehead...

A comic book panel showing Brad walking out of a doorway onto a city street. He is wearing a light blue shirt and a dark tie, and is carrying a dark jacket over his shoulder. The street has colorful buildings and trees.

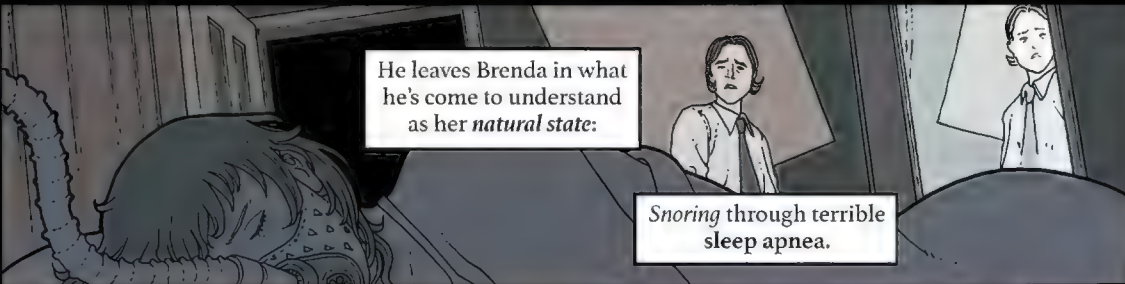
...and heads out the door to take the bus back home.

A comic book panel showing Brad looking at his reflection in a mirror. He is wearing a dark suit and tie. In the background, Rosalita is lying in bed, and a television set is visible on a stand.


In the kind of story I'm wont to write, Brad is repulsed by his reflection in Brenda's dirty mirror.

A comic book panel showing Brad looking at Rosalita, who is lying in bed. Brad is wearing a dark suit and tie. Rosalita is wearing a patterned nightgown and has her eyes closed.

He leaves Brenda in what he's come to understand as her *natural state*:

A comic book panel showing Brad looking out a window. He is wearing a dark suit and tie. The window shows a view of a city street with trees and buildings.

Snoring through terrible sleep apnea.

A comic book panel showing Brad walking on a city street. He is wearing a dark suit and tie. The street has colorful buildings and trees.

...and heads out to take the bus (piss-scented, remember) back home.



In the sort of thing I wish I could give you, Brad watches out the bus window as the city and its various facets *whoosh* by.



He's moved, if just for a moment, by the weird *beauty* of everything—the trees, the little shops, the *people* making their way to and fro.



In this, Brad also looks out the window.



But, despite his best efforts, the only thing he can seem to notice is how oppressively *gray* the sky is, how the clouds form a blanket of darkness over everything.

...how the world is *desperate* for a little *light*...





I desperately want the bus driver and Brad to get out and approach two cops who seem (to us) **competent** and full of **optimism** about the auto-related conundrum in front of them.

There's got to be a way to fix this.



"This" being the fact that a man, somehow, has found himself **trapped** beneath the full tonnage of a mid-sized sedan.



But instead:

Brad (*sans* bus driver, who "doesn't want to get involved") approaches the cops, who seem like a couple of real winners, if you catch my drift.

Jeez, Louise.

There's *no* way to save the guy.



Him, remember. The guy trapped under the car, who is very much alive, and saying:

Please... help...

In the kind of story
I wish I could
write, something
stirs in Brad.



Something *solidifies* in his
blood—call it courage, call it
hope, call it whatever you want.

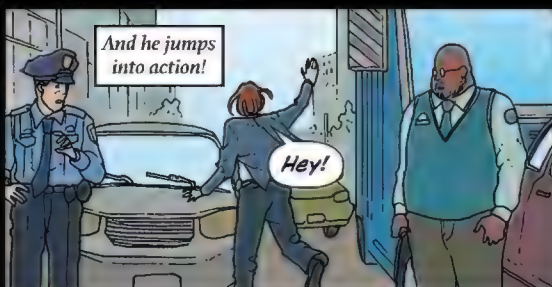


He looks at the
madness before him
and thinks, just like
the cop said, "There
has to be a way..."



And he jumps
into action!

Hey!



But in the stories
I write? *This one?*

...Brad just kind of stares
into the middle distance.



His hands are
shaking; his palms
covered in sweat.



He feels, as he's
often felt before,
that everything,
everywhere is
hopeless—



And so he keeps
on staring...

...what a friggin'
putz.









...the man in this story passes, his soul traveling to *who-knows-where*...if he even had a soul to begin with...



It's not your problem, but
I wanted to let you know:

I wish I could write
nicer stories.



Heroes crusading
in capes...



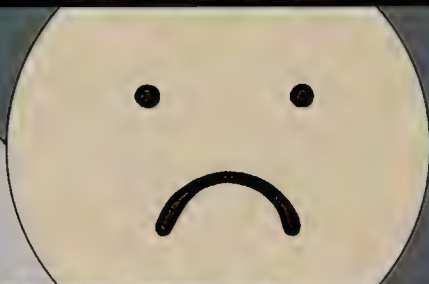
Men made of steel,
instilling *hope* into
each person they
fly over...



Stories of sobriety,
fidelity, *healing*...



But what comes out is
something *different*:



Creepy stand-ins
for the devil, or
true evil, or
whatever...



Men that die painful
deaths under cars for *no*
discernible reason...



Stories of drug abuse,
marital struggle, *pain*...







In the kind of story I wanted to write, Brad falls asleep with a smile on his face, and drifts off into *pleasant dreams*...

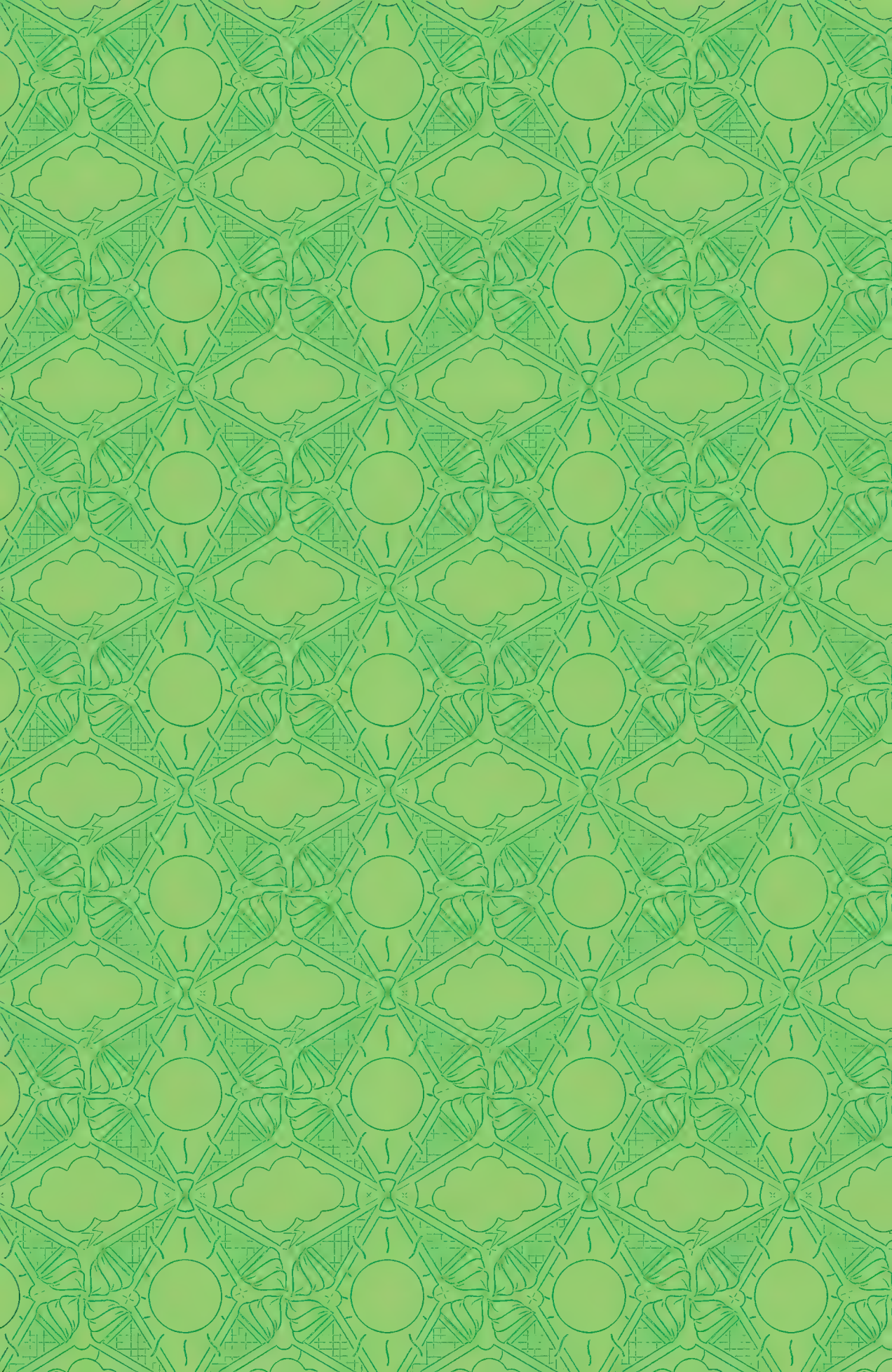
He saved the day...

People worked together toward a greater good...

The story had a happy ending...



But this isn't that
kind of story.





Ice
Cream
Man

THAT'S
YOUR
LIFE

034 ICM

CHAPTER 34 · TWO TRAMPS

What's
the *craziest*
thing you ever
heard?



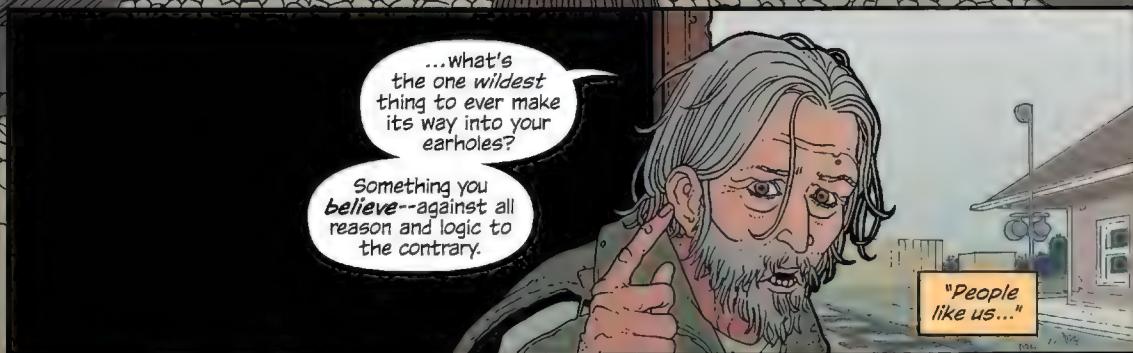
I'd been with Cranky
Old Phil for about four
years at that point,
give or take.



I don't know what that means, "craziest thing."

It don't have to *mean* anything. Just...

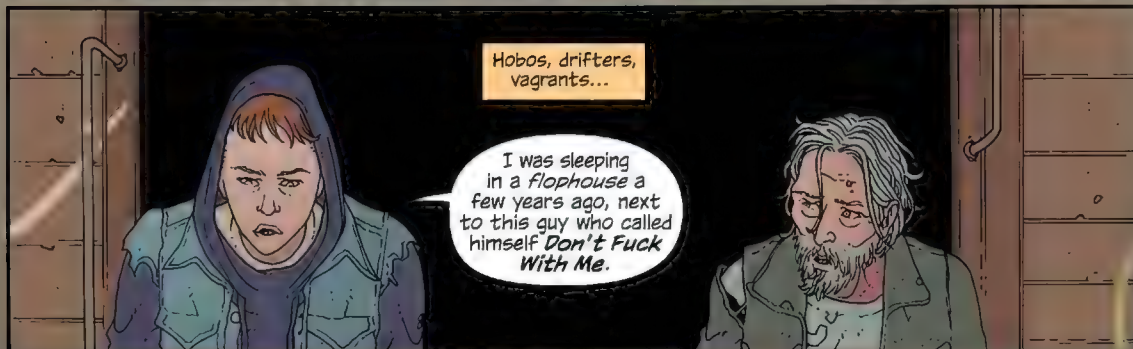
That's how it works with people like us--we travel in *pairs*. Sometimes maybe the oddball third wheel hangs around for a couple weeks... but usually it's just the *two*.



...what's the one *wildest* thing to ever make its way into your earholes?

Something you *believe*--against all reason and logic to the contrary.

"People like us..."



Hobos, drifters, vagrants...

I was sleeping in a flophouse a few years ago, next to this guy who called himself *Don't Fuck With Me*.



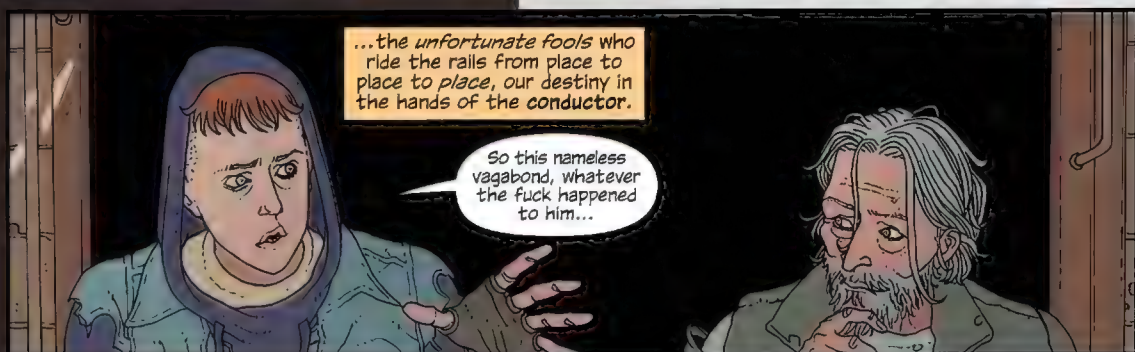
And Don't Fuck With Me told one of those urban-myth-type stories...

About one of our own that got turned into some kind of...I dunno...



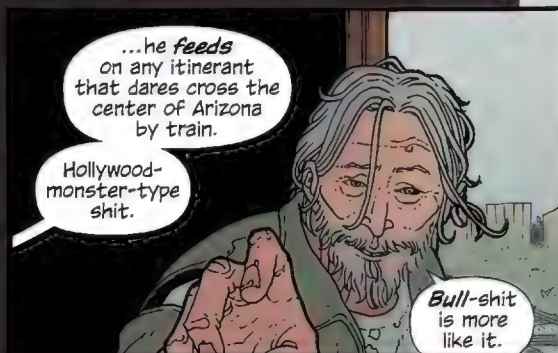
I guess *vampire* is what you'd might call it.

We're the ones that scrounge in the alleyways, take naps on park benches...



...the unfortunate fools who ride the rails from place to place, our destiny in the hands of the conductor.

So this nameless vagabond, whatever the fuck happened to him...



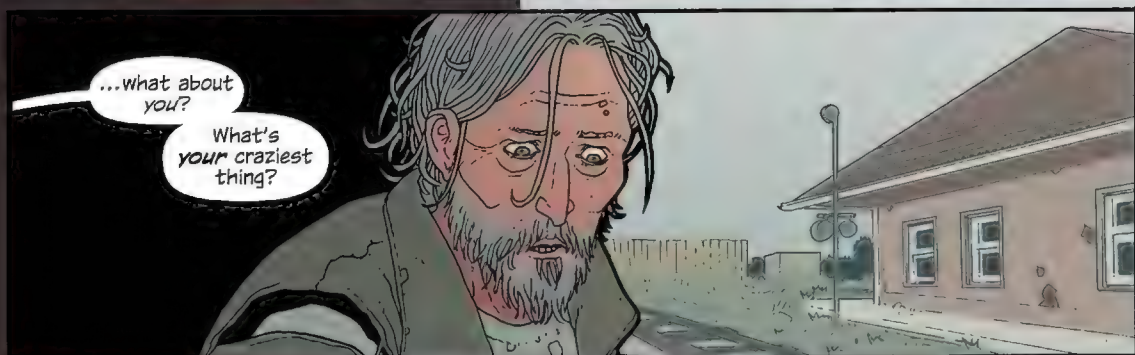
Bull-shit is more like it.

Hollywood-monster-type shit.

...he feeds on any itinerant that dares cross the center of Arizona by train.



Hey man, you asked me. I'm just telling you what I heard.



...what about you?

What's your craziest thing?



Heh...

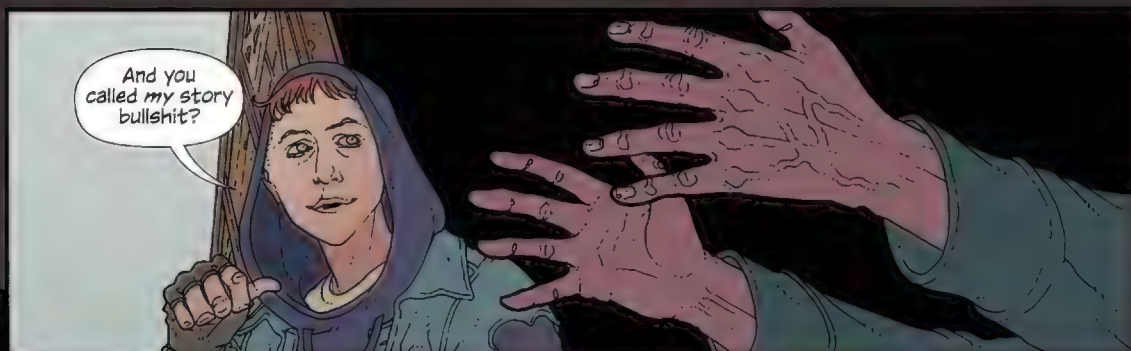


I heard that if you follow the sun all the way west...all the way out there to the very edge of the Pacific, that you can *bottle* a small piece of it.



A little shard of sunlight for just yourself.

It's yours.



And you called *my* story bullshit?



You live as long as I have, you get to know what's possible and what's not.



The train's about to pull away. Let's get *cozy*.

Me and Phil had a **system**. You **GOT** to have a system in place, to live this life.

Ours
was:

Never more
than one week
in the same
city.

You rummage the dumpsters
and trash cans, grab bottles
with any alcohol left out
of the recycling bins.

Maybe some *petty
theft*; usually a
fruit stand or a
hot dog vendor.

But no violence,
no weapons--we're
not *animals*.

And then, after all
that scavenging and
scraping, you get
back on the train...

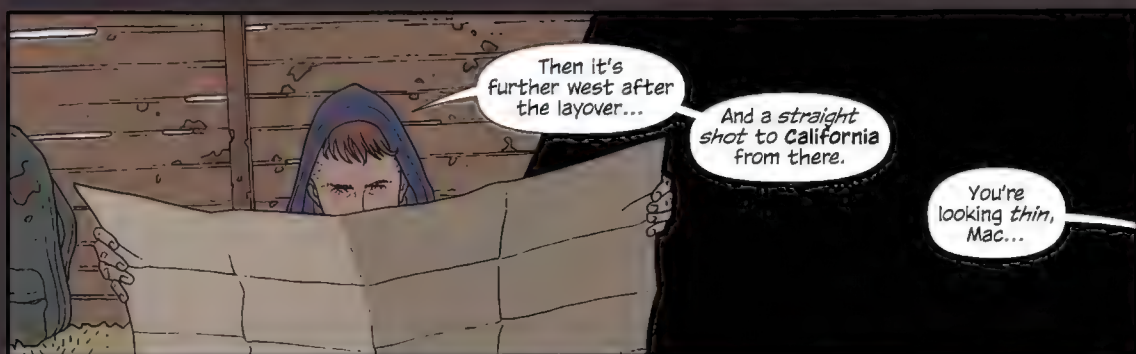
Choo-
choo.

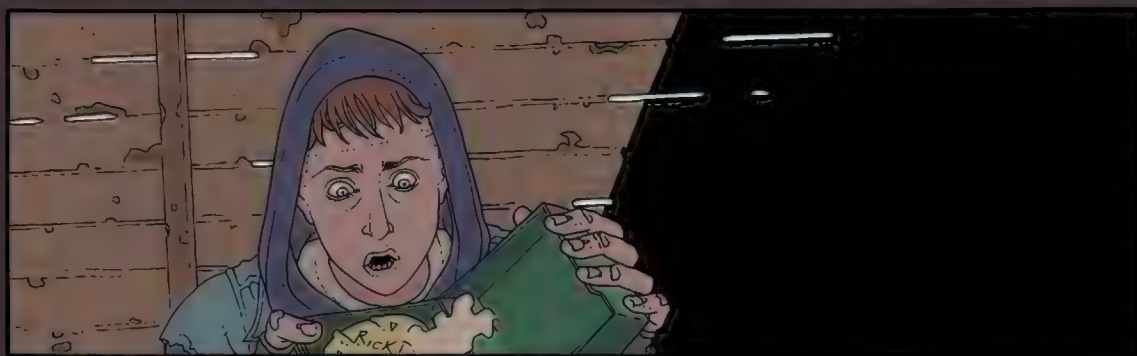
Human cargo,
on the way to:

Wherever the fuck it
happened to be going.

This thing's
stopping in **Santa**
Fe, I think...







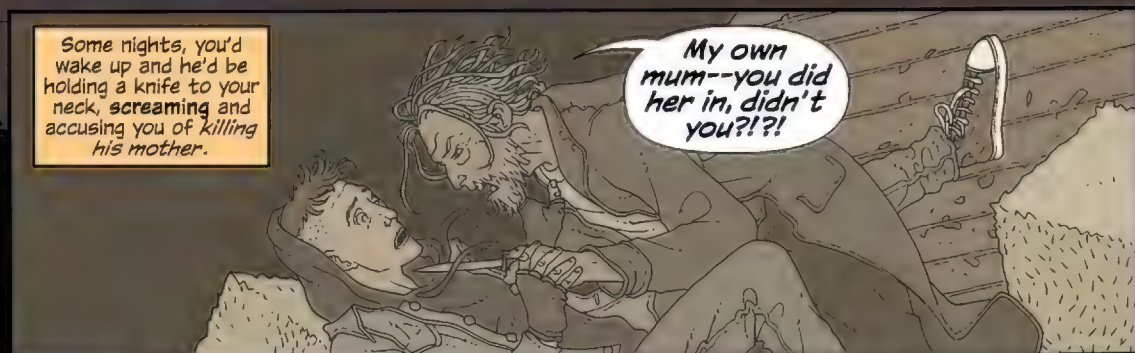


Nah, that
garbage gives
me the shits.
It's all yours,
burger king.



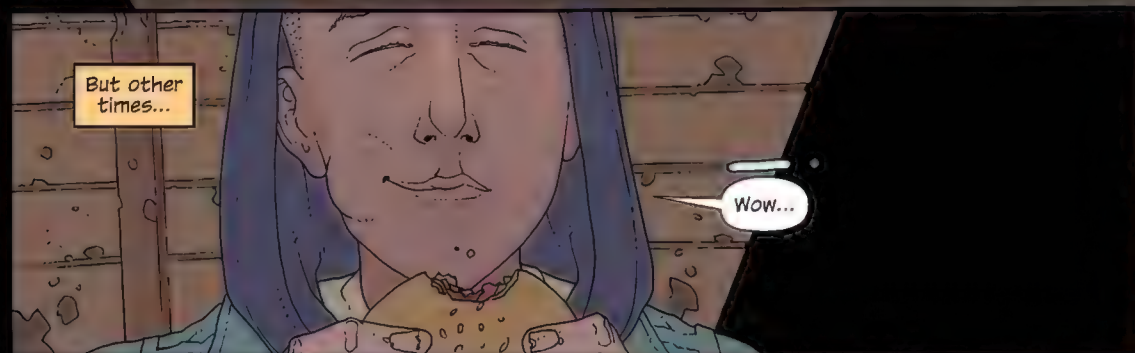
Have it
your way,
right?

Phil was funny
like that...



Some nights, you'd
wake up and he'd be
holding a knife to your
neck, screaming and
accusing you of killing
his mother.

My own
mum--you did
her in, didn't
you?!?!



But other
times...


Wow...



Thanks,
Phil.

Feh.

New Mexico
ain't ready for the
likes of us.



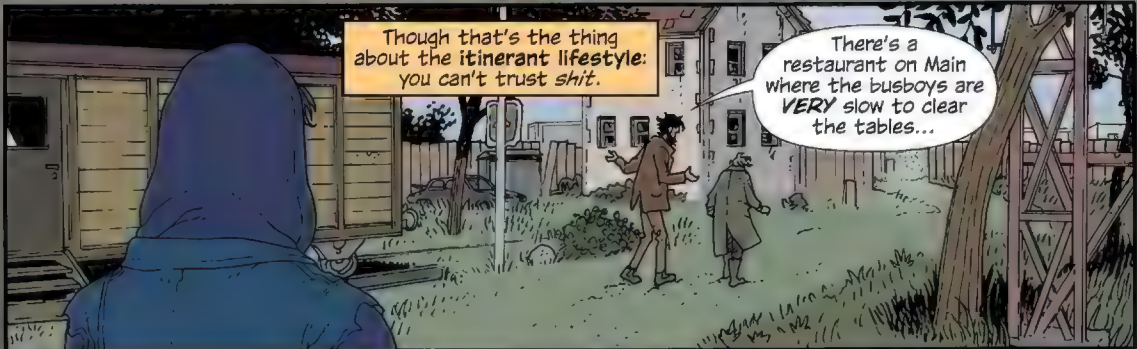
In Santa Fe we picked up a *third wheel*, a guy who went by the moniker *Vicious Vin*.

One week, you hear? Then we're disappeared from this place. *Ghosts*.



Aye aye, chief. *Ghosts* in a ghost story!

He didn't seem so *vicious* to me.



Though that's the thing about the itinerant lifestyle: you can't trust *shit*.

There's a restaurant on Main where the busboys are *VERY* slow to clear the tables...



Three to five ounces of prime rib, just left there rotting in the sun...

Not your instincts, not your gut feelings, your hunches...



Not even your own *eyes*...



Regardless, we stuck to the system:

Diving in dumpsters for day-old bread from the local bakeries;

Fucking sourdough, boys!



Clearing the tables at outdoor restaurants. (Vin was right--no one in Santa Fe ever finished their prime rib.)

Get out of here, ya louts!



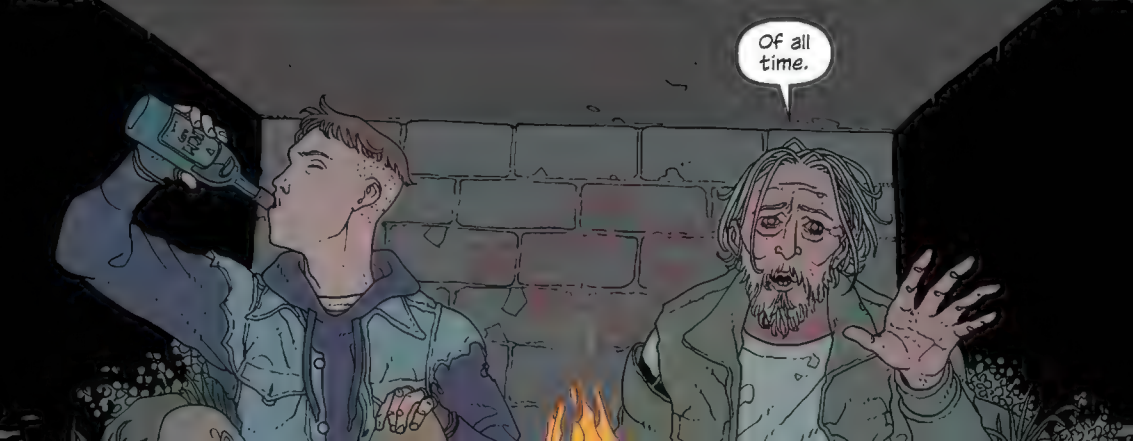
We drank bad wine on the outskirts of town...

What's the weirdest thing you ever heard, Vicious Vin?



Weirdest thing?

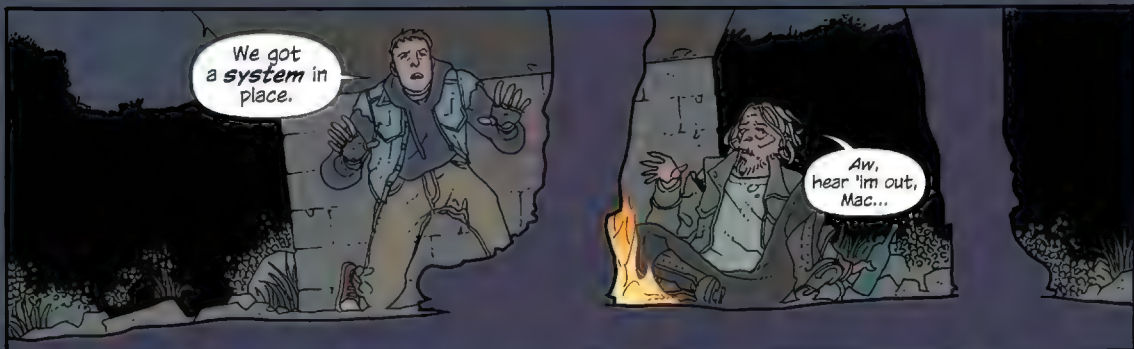
HEED THE CALL

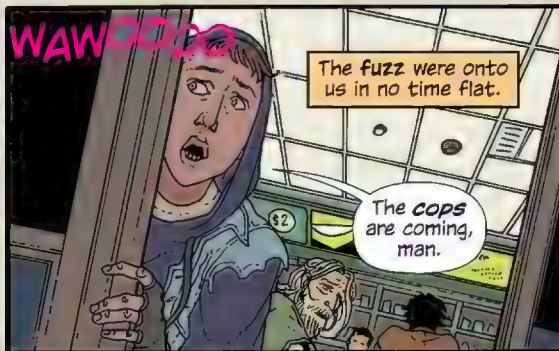


Of all time.









We hightailed it
through the tall grass
behind Main Street, all
the way back to the
train depot...



...through the
chaparral and the
thorny bushes with
little boll weevils
hanging off their
sides...



THUPTHUPTHUP

Are those
fucking
helicopters?

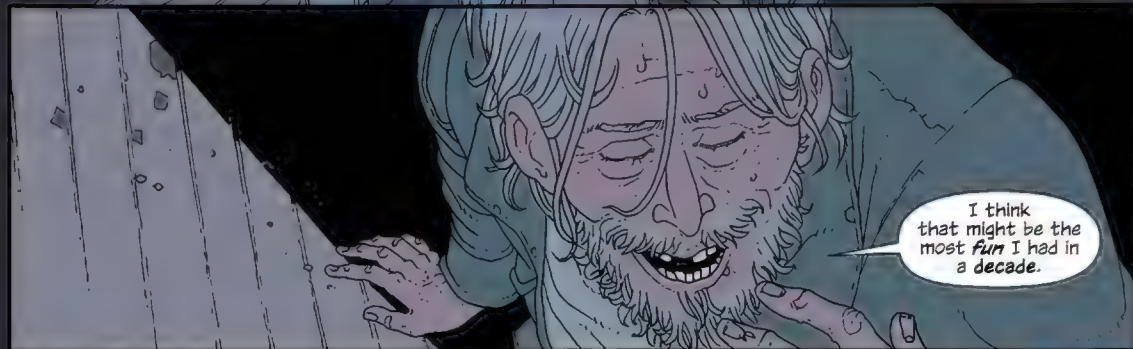
Don't
believe your
eyes, Mac...



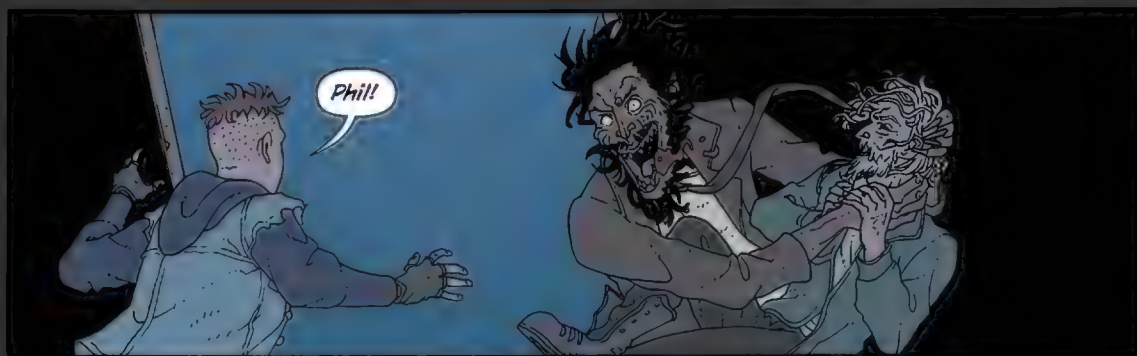
Could just
as well be vultures
circling...

Now RUN,
dammit!





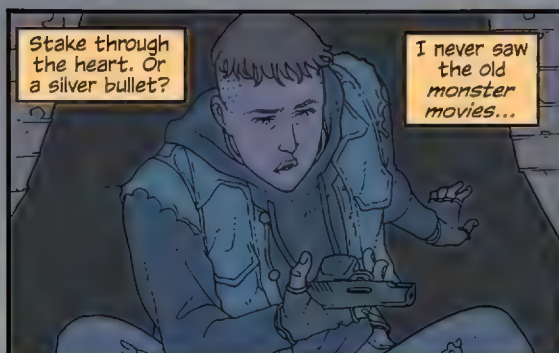






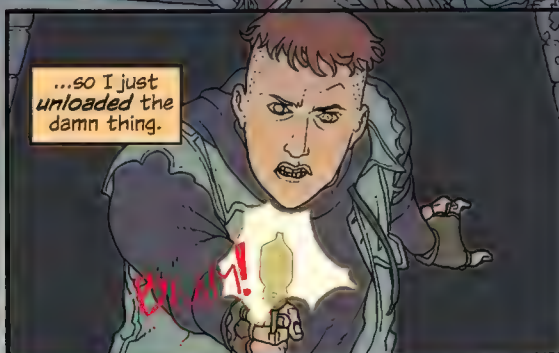
...I'M KIDDING.
THAT SHIT
DON'T WORK.

YOU CAN'T
BELIEVE EVERYTHING
YOU HEAR,
TRAMP...

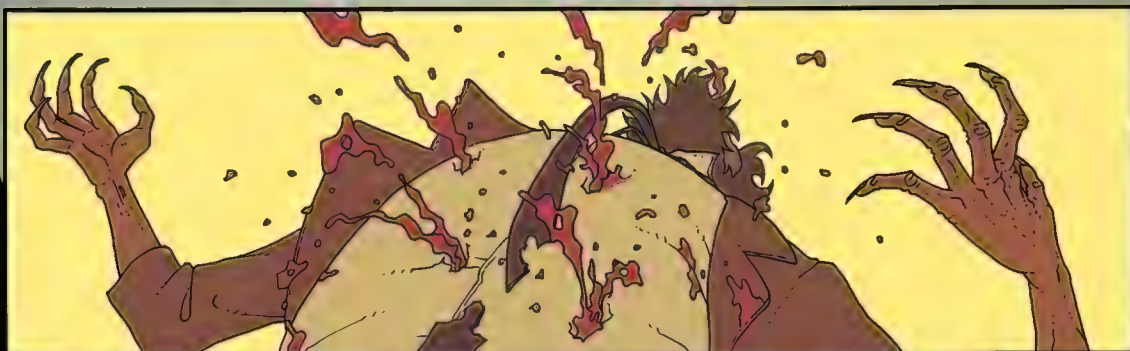


Stake through
the heart. Or
a silver bullet?

I never saw
the old
monster
movies...



...so I just
unloaded the
damn thing.



**BANG.
BANG.
BANG.**





...where I carried Phil
across the beach...

Through the *searing*
sand, over the little
broken seashells that
stick into the bottom
of your feet...

And *sat* with him there,
right by where the surf
meets the shore.

Shoulda
stuck to the
system...

Phil,
man. I--

Look,
Mac...

Turns out
everything
is real...

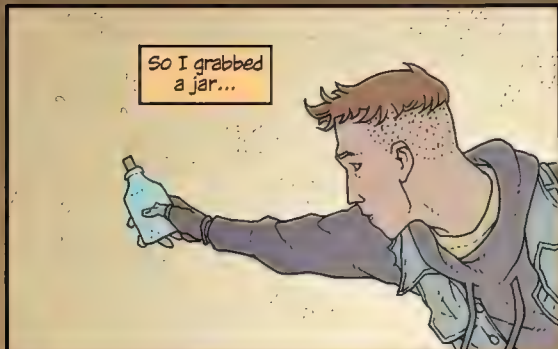
It don't matter
how strange.



I wasn't sure
what to do....



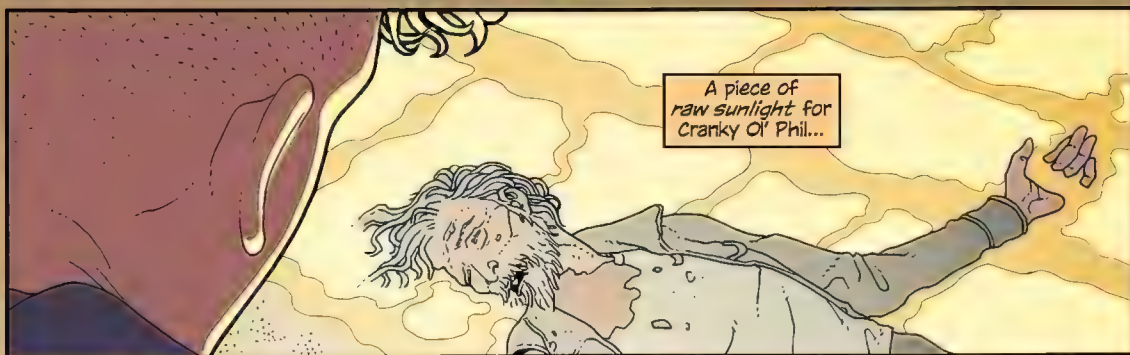
So I grabbed
a jar...



And bottled
a star.



A piece of
raw sunlight for
Cranky Ol' Phil...



...or something
like that.

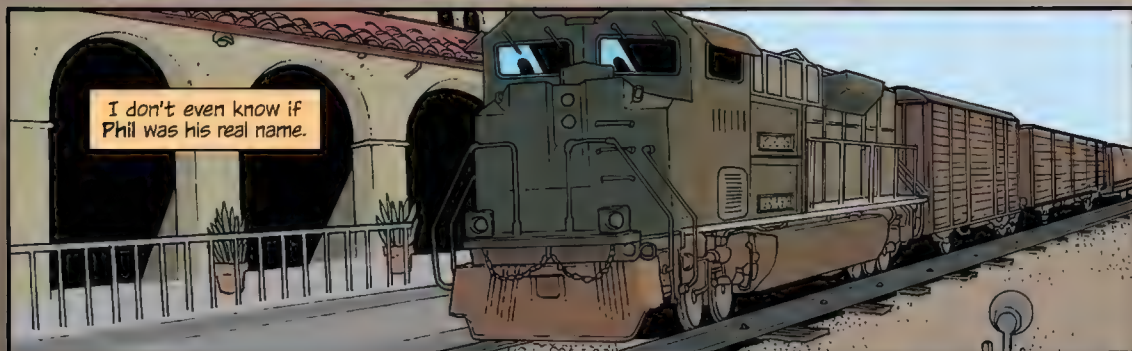


The truth is I didn't know anything about Phil.



Where he was from;
what kinds of things
he liked to do;

What actually
happened to
his mom...



I don't even know if
Phil was his real name.



Still, I *loved* that guy.
He was my best friend in
the whole entire world.

Chugga
chugga choo
choo.

You don't have to
know someone to
love them.

I'm still out here, by the way, riding the rails from place to place...

...all the way up the Pacific coast, then east through Montana...

...got palled up with some sort of wandering gaucho.

Hey, Caleb...

What's the craziest thing you ever heard?

...but he keeps mostly to himself.

Tt.

Got me a *third* wheel, too...

A little shard of sunlight to call my own.

I'm bringing it with me...

*...wherever this
train decides to
go next.*





ICE CREAM MAN PRESENTS

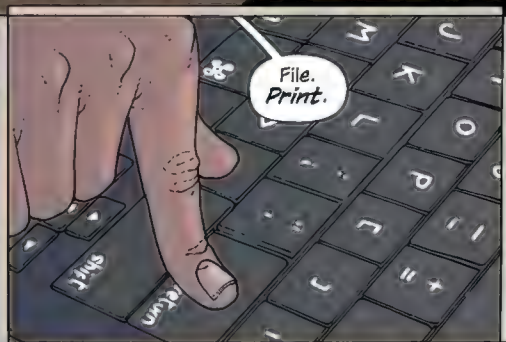
THE BOOK OF NECESSARY MONSTERS

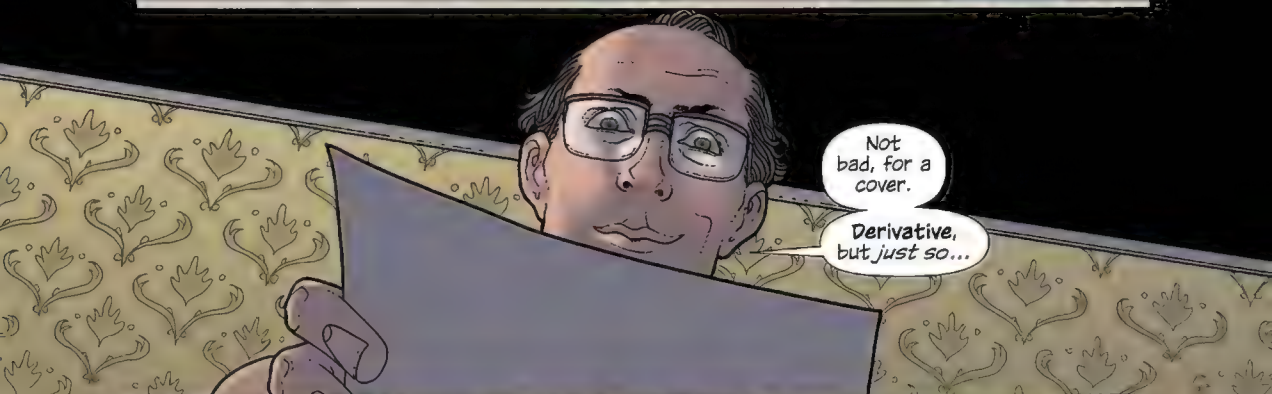
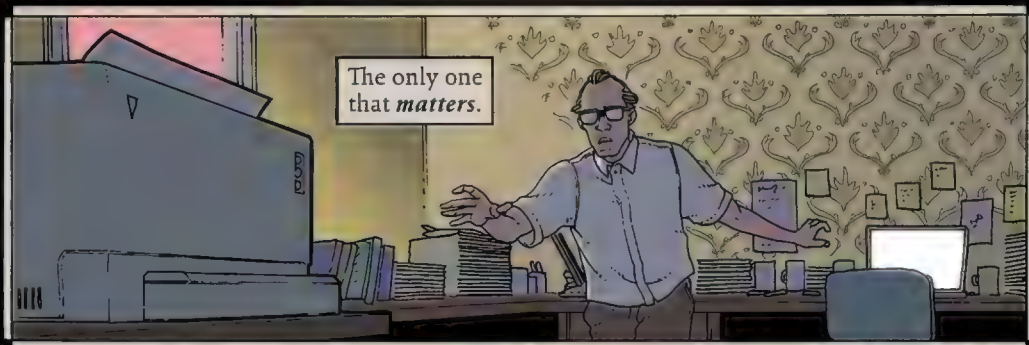
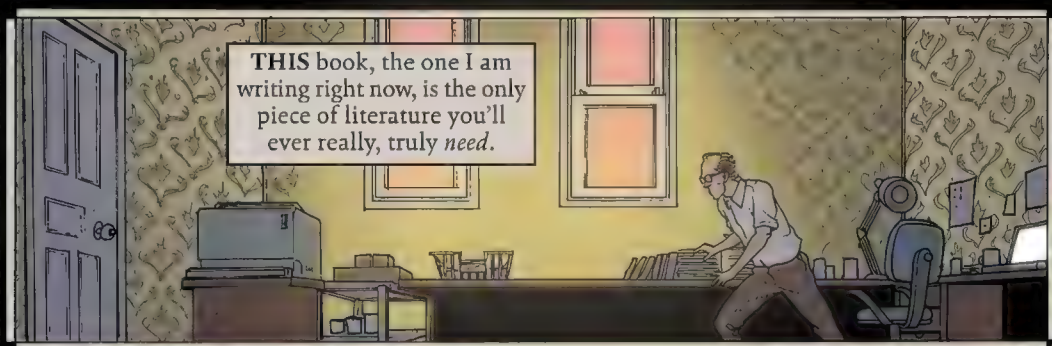


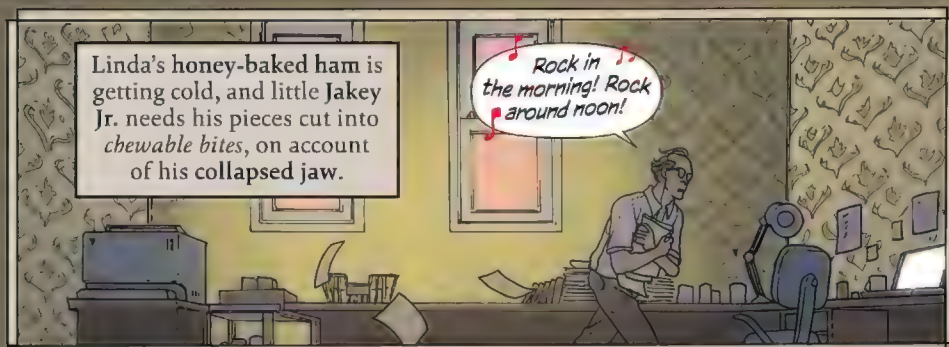
CHAPTER 35

W. MAXWELL
PRINCE

ILLUSTRATED BY MARTIN MDRAZZO
COLORED BY CHRIS O'HALLORAN







Allow me to tell you all
about the harmonic
insidiousness of

The Earworm

It is agreed upon by nearly every person in the medical profession that the most direct path to the human brain is *through the ears*. Thusly does the **Earworm** squirm its treacherous path to the temporal lobe with its wriggling, cilia-like legs and arms. (One cannot be sure which little hairs on the slimy sucker are arms, and which ones are, in fact, legs...)

The Earworm catches **music**—specifically, a song you **don't** want to hear—in its snarling maw and deposits the song in the folds of your gray matter. Elevator muzak, a high-pitched pop hit on the radio, a child's lullaby—the Earworm takes these unenjoyable tunes and *replays* them in your skull, over and over and over, via its *uvula*...which it turns out is just a tiny little phonograph in the back of its throat.

Even this world's most composed are not immune to the worm's deleterious sonic attacks; indeed, some of our bravest and brightest have taken artillery to their temples (most commonly, a handheld revolver), screaming as they pull the trigger, "*I can't get this fucking song out of my head!*"



The Gum Dream

The **Gum Dream** ranks in the top ten of all-time recurring nightmares, according to the *Journal for General Sleeplessness*. Your author takes no pleasure in noting that he tends to have some variation of the Gum Dream up to three times weekly, for the past twenty-six years. (With other nights belonging to, in no particular order: The Teeth Are Piano Keys Dream; The Mohel Has Come For Just a Snippet More Dream; The Andalusian Nightmare; plus others!)

All people eventually have the Gum Dream, which is not actually a dream at all—it's a *sentient, psychic elastomer meant to rob you of your sleep and make the subsequent day unbearable*. You can't touch this monster, but boy does it *love* to get all over you...in between the molars, up inside your cheeks, &c.

And its morphology (as a **menacing dreamshape**) is thus: you've got this big wad of gum in your mouth that you can't seem to ever get out. You pull and pull, but there's MORE gum, always more more *more*. You can stretch the stuff for all eternity and still you'll **never** find the end of that miserable Hubba Bubba or Trouble Bubble or Juicy Lucy or whatever it was you so stupidly unwrapped and started masticating with your idiotic, slack-jawed mouth. Go ahead and try to talk, dreamer. See? *You can't*. Not until morning, at least, when you'll wake up feeling totally unrested and unprepared for another crappy day.




Shameful Memory

Maybe you pushed little Ricky Johnson off the seesaw in grade school? Or perhaps you cheated on your high school girlfriend (*poor Tracy!*) with her BFF Jenna (whose fellatio you didn't quite enjoy anyway, it being a little heavy on the central incisors). Or maybe, now, as an adult, you are a distracted and harried father, never quite present for your wife or child, always working and never tending to their [significant] emotional needs.

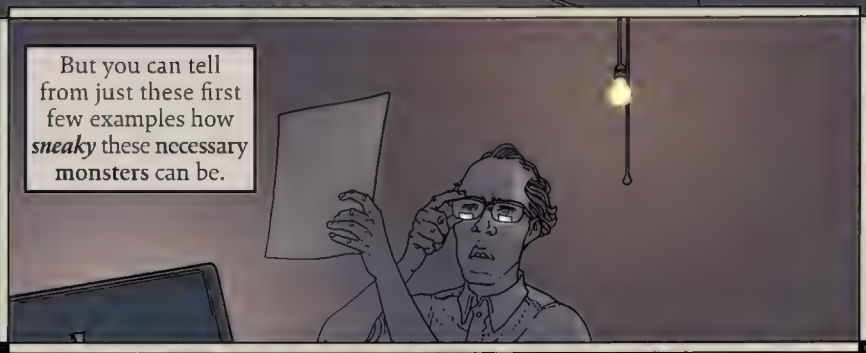
These might sound like different things, but they are all, in fact, variegated forms of a *single* monster: **The Shameful Memory**. This little fucker tucks itself all cozy into your hippocampus, your neocortex, your poor, indefensible amygdala.

It haunts you **forever**, never letting you feel fully redeemed or “good.” (If there even is such a thing...) For every act of decency in your sad, sorry life, the Shameful Memory is at the ready, there to remind you that, no, you are not “good”—you're a piece of shit, Mark. You have erred, have done *serious wrong*. You've HURT people, and if you think you can forget about THAT, you've got another thing coming!

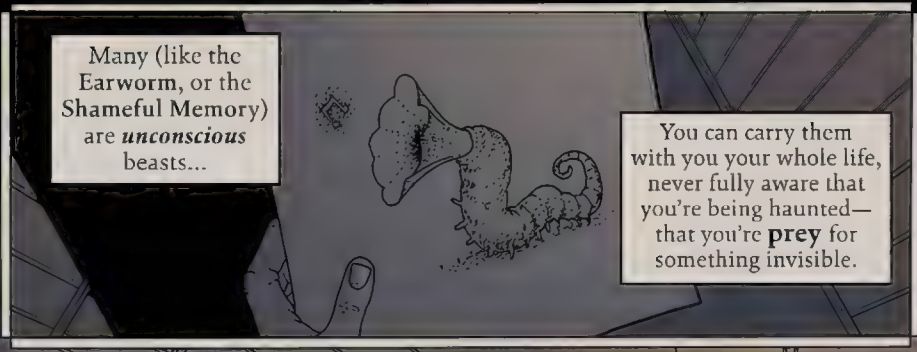




I'm in the **attic** now,
for reasons that will
become obvious later.




But you can tell
from just these first
few examples how
sneaky these necessary
monsters can be.




Many (like the
Earworm, or the
Shameful Memory)
are *unconscious*
beasts...

You can carry them
with you your whole life,
never fully aware that
you're being haunted—
that you're **prey** for
something invisible.

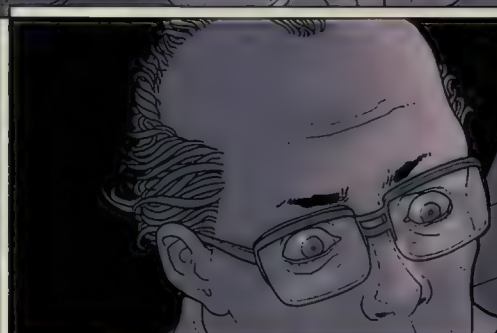


I was
singing a
song earlier,
wasn't I?


I hadn't the
slightest...



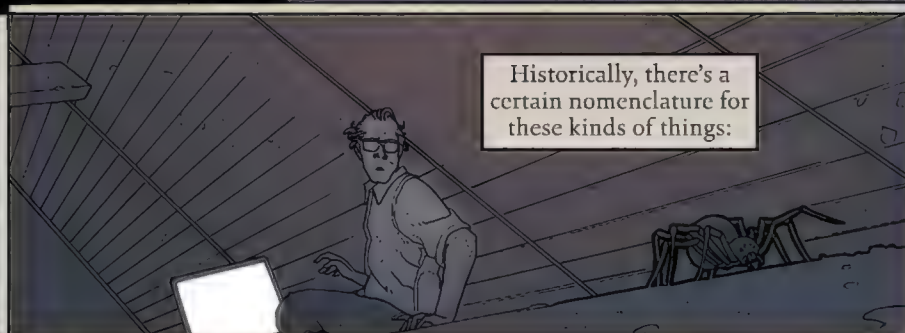
Other monsters are more corporeal in nature.



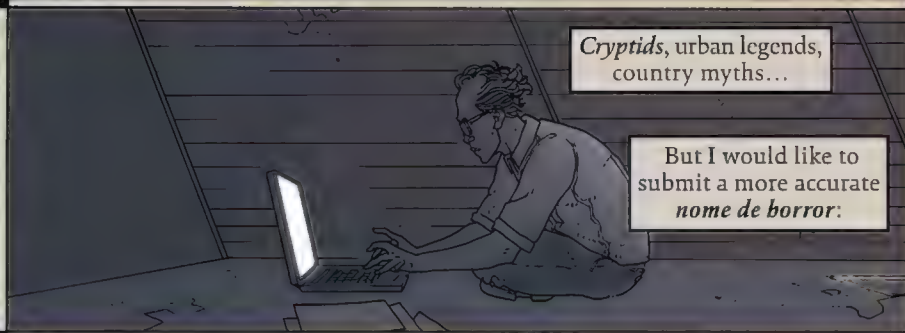
They take *physical* form in the earthly plane—can be touched, felt...



...and swallowed.




Historically, there's a certain nomenclature for these kinds of things:



Cryptids, urban legends, country myths...

But I would like to submit a more accurate *nome de horror*:



Bad ideas made manifest.

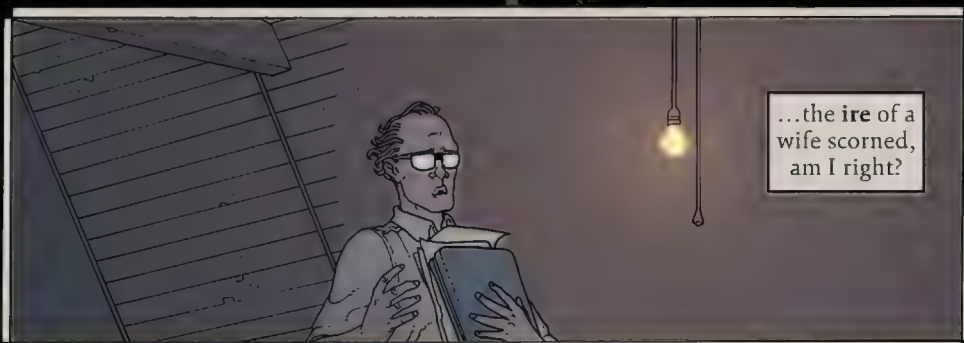
"...a *spider-monster* in the shape of a person..."



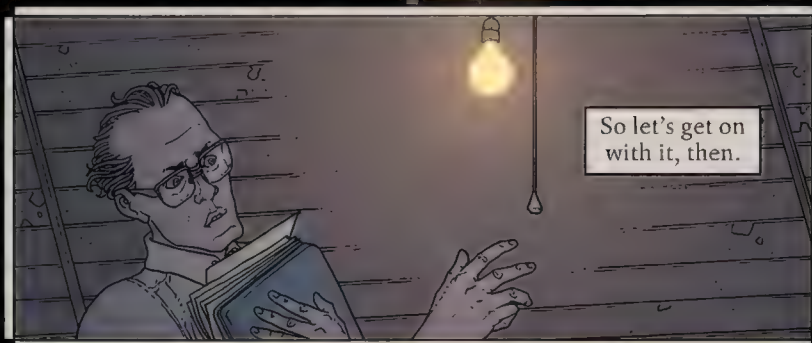
Jacob?
Are you up in the
attic? With the
luggage?!



Linda is going to be
awful **cross** with me if I
miss supper again.



...the **ire** of a
wife scorned,
am I right?



So let's get on
with it, then.

CLICK!

Perhaps you've
heard tell of

King Spider

Readers of this bestiary might well be accustomed with the notion of the “Rat King,” (from the German *Rattenkönig*). This stomach-souring phenomenon is when a team of murine specimens (anywhere from six to forty beady-eyed motherfuckers!) join their tails together to create one giant, twisted **Ultra Rat**—a monstrosity deserving of its regal honorific.

But fewer people know about an even more harrowing single-species amalgamation: **The King Spider**. From the Swedish *Mëgabüg*, The King Spider is the joining together of no less than ONE HUNDRED arachnids into a single, disgusting entity. What’s worse: these buggies, working in concert, tend to fuse into the form of a walking, talking *homo sapien*—that’s right, a spider-monster in the shape of a person!

Attics, crawl spaces, abandoned mine shafts: these are just a few of the dark locales our venerated **Monarch of Many Legs** might choose to assemble and appear.

Those who have met His Majesty (and weren’t immediately paralyzed by one of the *jesters* from its midsection), have described him as “a dark writhing thing of a half-hundred eyes”, and also, “a dead ringer for my uncle Randy, who happens to be a pedophile.” These subjective appraisals are meaningless, though. What matters is the truth: there is a being—a *neccessary* one—comprising a hundred creepy-crawlies, ready to dissemble at any second and send every one of its eight-legged soldiers up the cuffs of your pants, into your shirtsleeves...and, of course, directly into your mouth, where they will lay their million eggs and turn you into a hatching ground for a veritable monarchy of foul progeny yet to come. (*All hail the king!*)



Time-suck

There's that famous Yakov Smirnoff joke: "*In Russia, time takes you!*" But that's not just a Soviet thing—it can be said of all time, *all the time*. Some of this exchange is conscious, part of a system of time-relinquishment in which we are willing participants: work meetings; parent-teacher conferences; trips to the grocery store; long traffic on the interstate. We *choose* to give our time over to these vectors of tedium; they are "normal" parts of everyday life.

But then (and much more insidiously) there are the things that rob us of our time without us knowing it: **Time-sucks**. These are objects and events that can secretly take *years* off your life, with you left totally unawares as your hair begins to gray, crow's feet form around the sides of your eyes, and your prostate triples in size to about the circumference of a regulation soccer ball.

Social media; prestige TV; listening to the monologue inside your head as it tells you how fake and repulsive you are; arguing with your conservative family; cat video after cat video after goddamn cat

video. *All* these things will suck time *right from your face*, leaving nothing behind but a hollow, listless shell who is desperate to claw back just a few of those precious lost minutes.





I've moved to the bathroom for the time being.

One reason for this is that I had a large cup of coffee this morning, and *really* needed to "*drain the lizard*," as the saying goes.



But the other, more obvious reason:

The attic was no longer safe:

I saw a *vibrating shadow* in the corner of the room, in the shape of a *man*.

I know who it was—I'm no fool.





But here's
the rub:

The bathroom itself is host
to one of the most vile,
blink-and-you'll-miss-it
monsters in the whole
wretched menagerie:

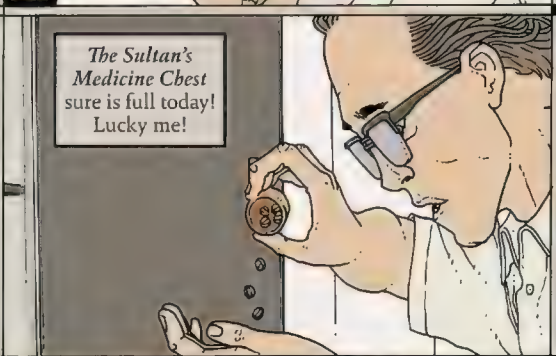


**The Cabinet of
Medications.**



Alprazolam.
Clonazepam.

Tramadol.
Hydrocodone...

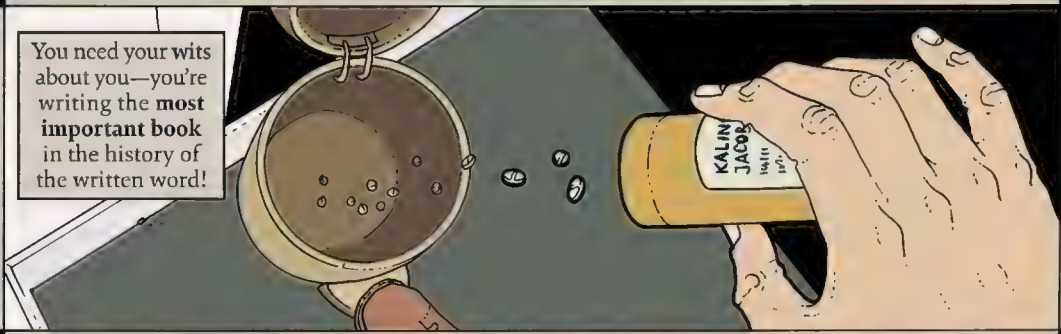


*The Sultan's
Medicine Chest
sure is full today!
Lucky me!*

No, Jacob.
No, no, no.



You need your wits
about you—you're
writing the **most
important book**
in the history of
the written word!



...and your **son** needs
his ham carved up into
little squares. His poor
jaw, remember.

Jacob,
darling. Dinner is
getting *cold*!

What on
Earth are you
doing in the
washroom?



...Oxycodone.

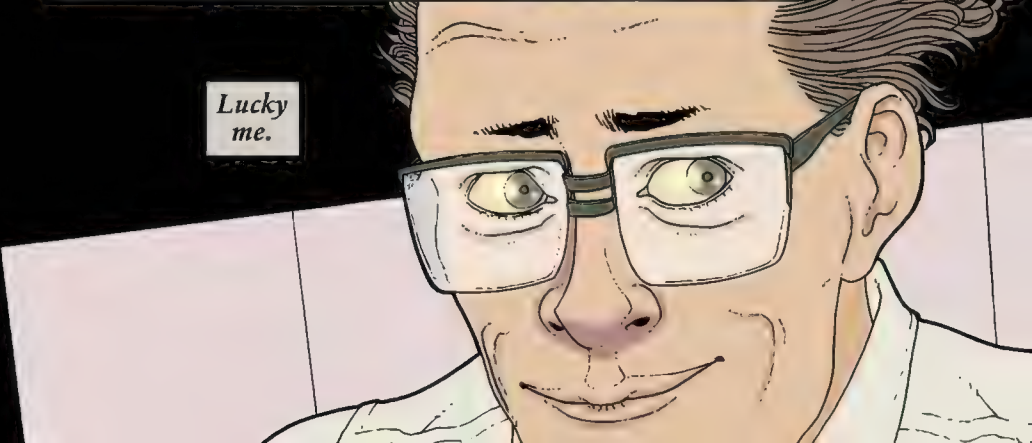
I haven't taken an
Oxy in months...



The Sultan
won't even
notice it's
missing...



Lucky
me.

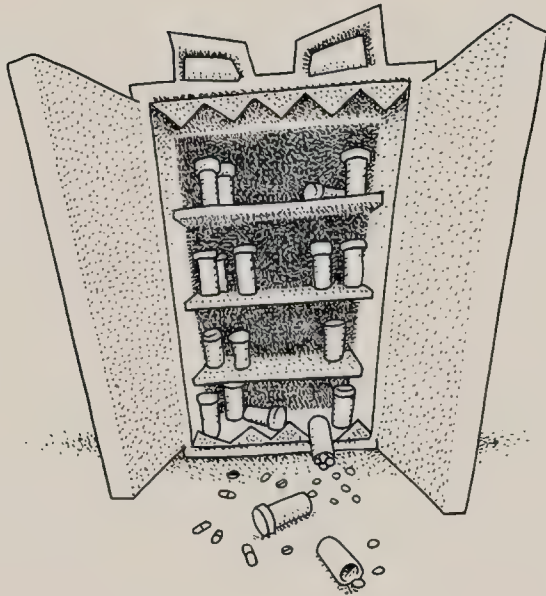


The Cabinet of Medications

Nearly every house in nearly every subdivision features a **Cabinet of Medications**. And while bathroom furniture might not at first seem like the sort of thing one need worry about, I implore you to take a beat and think otherwise: it's chock-full of *poisons that make you happy*. (Some people, it's been said, get lost in the cabinet and never find their way back—like those poor little English children in their mahogany Narnia closet.)

No two cabinets are alike, but each one is replete with riches: opioids, benzos, mild steroids, male enhancement pills, antidepressants. In some cases, Schedule II narcotics in little baggies, hidden inside a mint tin. And hey—there's even a range of totally innocuous NSAIDs, if your knee is acting up or something.

So long as you're unafraid of the **Sultan's** wrath (there is no Sultan, by the way), then go ahead and raid the Cabinet of your neighbor, your cousin, your new girlfriend with the chronic lumbar issue. *Get high on their supply!* Just a taste won't hurt...until it does.

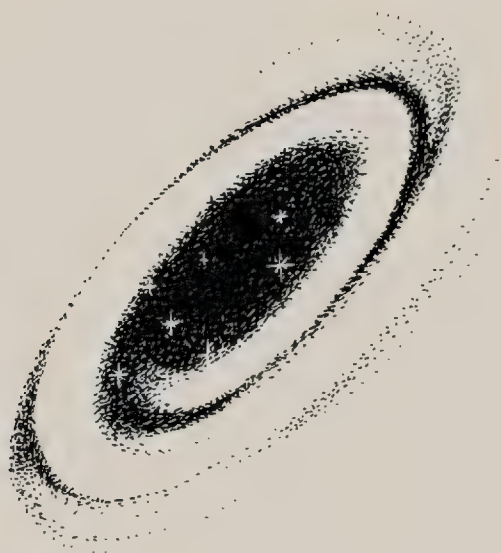


The Chasm

There is a hole that runs deep and wide. It separates you from what you wish to know. That might sound abstract, so let's be concrete: there exists a **Chasm** between you and the *Truth*. A great pit, dim in color and oblong in shape; it's there right now, at the corner of the carpet, in the very room you're sitting in.

There is no bridging the great chasm, so don't get any cute ideas. It is, by definition, **distance**, and that distance is built into the very foundations of what we sometimes call *epistemology*. Put bluntly: no matter how hard you try to learn something (or know a person, or remember a pattern...) you **can't**. *You aren't meant to*. The chasm is there to keep you away from revelation. Forever unknowing, forever haunted by [huge] gaps in your knowledge.

Why do we betray the ones we love most? Why do we have nightmares about candy? Why can't you forget what you did to poor Tina Hoffman in the cafeteria of your high school? And why is every minute of your life—tick by tick by tick—*stolen* from you by an endless litany of distractions? You'll just **never know**—the hole runs deep and wide.



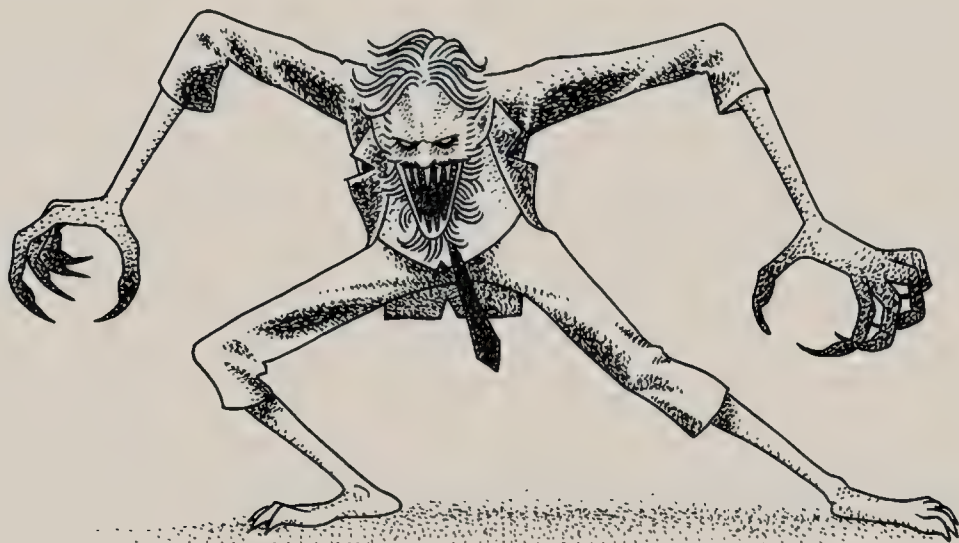
Freight Train Dracula

All over the world, vagrants take shelter in the barren, dusty cars of freight trains, ferried to and fro by a power greater than themselves. (*The Conductor*, duh!) But in America, some of these folks—let’s call them *tramps*—face a specific, sharp-toothed danger: **The Freight Train Dracula.**

The FTD, it is said, feeds (in the fashion that vampires are known to) on any mendicant who dares cross by train over the large landmass of Arizona. (The state’s capital, Phoenix, is hardly worth mentioning in these pages—it’s very hot and *very* boring.)

As it happens, it was only recently that a tramp named Phil—beloved by his fellow travelers, especially a young itinerant named Mac—became food for an FTD who called himself “*Vicious Vin.*” Vin—transformed into a creature beyond all recognition—sank his sharp, protracted teeth into Phil’s *neck*, abridging the old man’s life and leaving Mac (*poor kid*) all alone in his continental wanderings.

So be careful out there, ye bums and derelicts, lest you become a Southwestern snack for the transient undead.





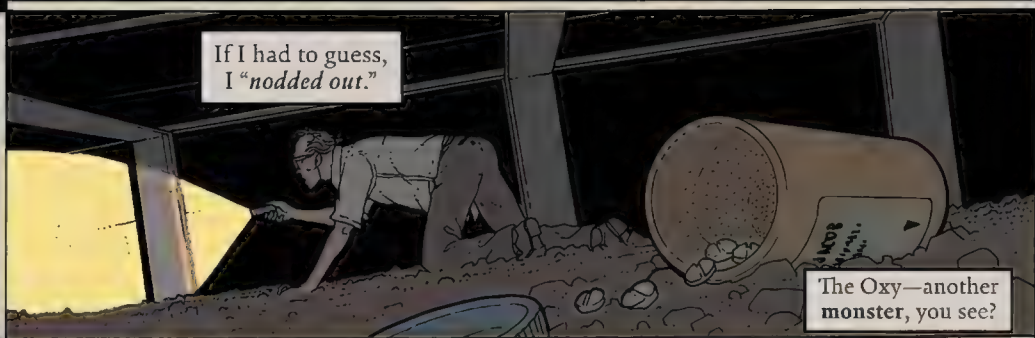
It would appear, by the exceedingly *limited* height of my current location...



...that I'm in the **crawl space** under the front porch.



If I had to guess, I "*nodded out*."



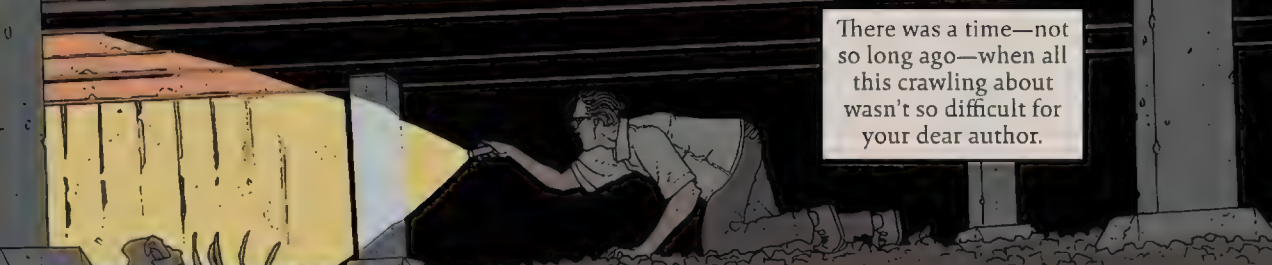
The Oxy—another monster, you see?



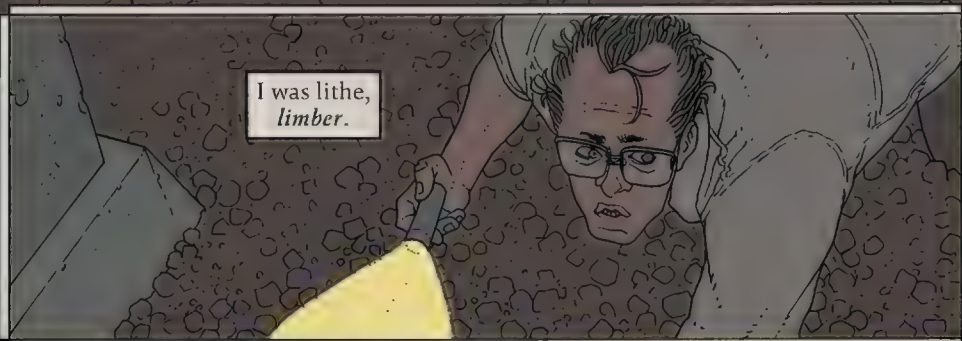
Jacob? This is getting *ridiculous*. A woman cooks all day...



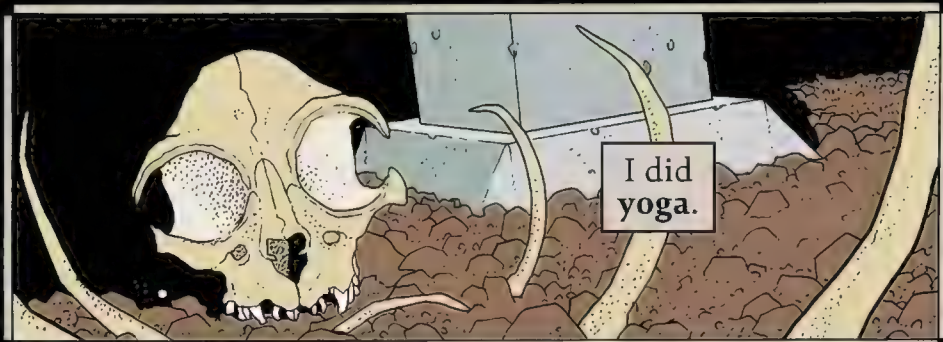
Father, where are you? My honey-baked ham is absolutely *tepid*!



There was a time—not so long ago—when all this crawling about wasn't so difficult for your dear author.



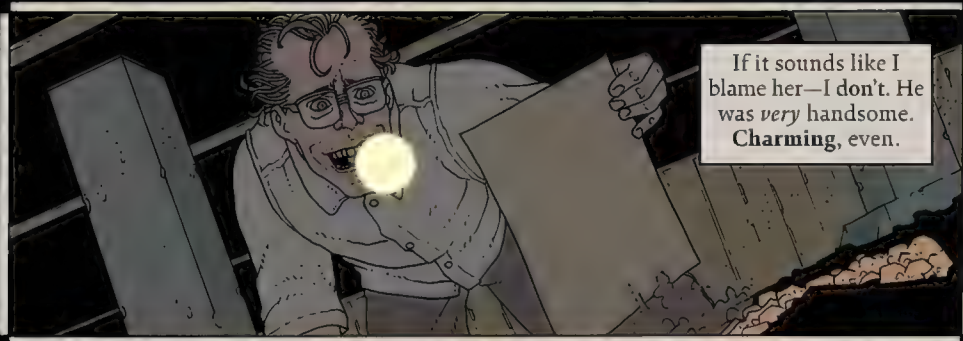
I was lithe, *limber*.



I did *yoga*.



But Linda had to go and have that...*dalliance* with our yoga instructor.



If it sounds like I blame her—I don't. He was *very* handsome. **Charming**, even.



I just wish she didn't have to do it in *front* of me, with my hands strapped to the chair...



I need to find a way back to the **study**...



I've a goddamn **book** to finish!

The Yoga Instructor

His name could be Chad. Or Avi. Or Bhodi. Or Rosewater. Or something like, “I don’t even use names, man, because they’re so limiting; I contain multitudes, you know?” *Whatever* preposterous appellation this monster attempts to use, do not be fooled: it is some form or another of **The Yoga Instructor**.

The Yoga Instructor will start off (like so many things do) as something seemingly *beneficial*: a fitness professional available (for \$100 every thirty minutes) to help you and your wife “get into shape.” You’ve both been so busy, and here’s someone who’s willing (albeit for a pretty steep price...) to help you shed a few of those unwanted pounds.

But make no mistake, The Yoga Instructor exists for one reason and one reason only: *to copulate with your betrothed*. (If you’re one of the unlucky ones, Chad and Linda will strap you to a chair in the bedroom and make you watch as they contort and writhe in positions you simply *did not know* were achievable by normal human anatomy.)

Let’s do some yoga now: take a finger and point it at yourself, right in your very own face. *There*—you’ve perfected the **cuckold pose**.

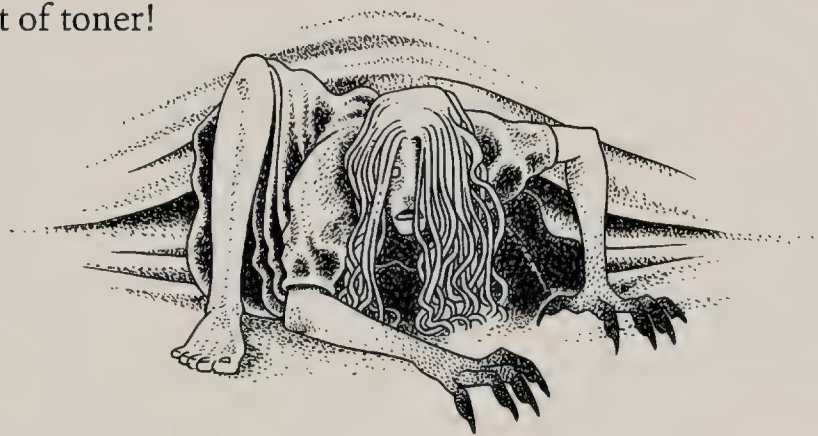


The Woman in the Wallpaper

This one might be a product of my own mental deterioration; I'm not so sure. But it's an important (and necessary!) monster either way. Those who paid attention in middle school English class might very well remember the late 19th century short story, "*The Yellow Wallpaper*," by one Charlotte Perkins Gilman. It is a harrowing tale of a woman who is put on "rest cure" (i.e., *trapped against her will*) within the quadrangle confines of a small Victorian bedroom—which just so happens to be covered, moulding-to-moulding, with a sickly yellow wallpaper.

The woman, imprisoned in the realm of her mind (and bored beyond belief), comes to **see** things in that flaxen wall covering: undulating tableaus of unknown shape; warping, animalistic imagery; and, ultimately, a bug-like creature (herself, it turns out) crawling behind the wallpaper, scratching with its grubby nails to get free. It's a metaphor of some kind.

Here's the thing, though: that woman? She's really there—she *did* escape the wallpaper of my study, and now tends to lurch in the corners of the ceilings, in an insectoid posture that might be best described as "*Kafka-esque*." She's mostly harmless, but I've come to suspect that her continued presence has put a curse on my printer—the thing is always out of toner!



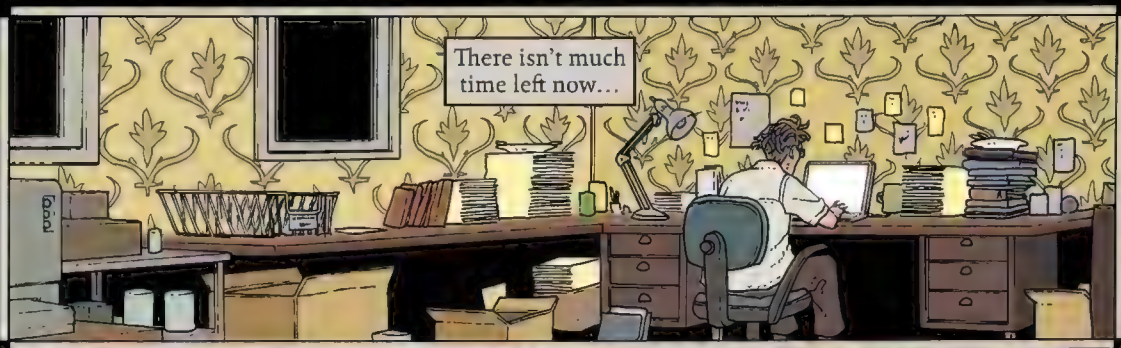
The Ice Cream Man

Who can even say? This mysterious soda jerk (who might be the devil, or might be a god, or might be nothing at all...) is just one of countless monsters we must abide during our time on this sorry excuse for a planet. An evil as necessary as the next, the **Ice Cream Man** has been there before, will be there again, is there *right now* if you turn your head slowly to the right to look over your shoulder.

As for his true nature...does it even matter at this point? Sure, there's a mythology *somewhere* in there, maybe within the pages of some lost text (or perhaps some *comic book*), that could explain his presence and motives in our realm...but would *knowing* any of that mitigate your suffering **right now**?

Cancer, bad weather, mass shootings, privatization, malevolent behavior by those we trusted—there's no avoiding *any* of it. The Ice Cream Man is just another in a long list of ills, doing his best to convince us that there's no hope. *Is he right?*





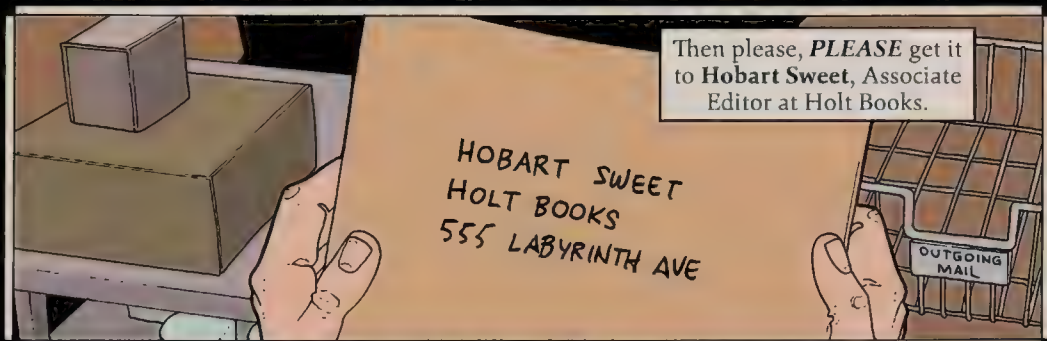


Dear Reader, I
beg of you:

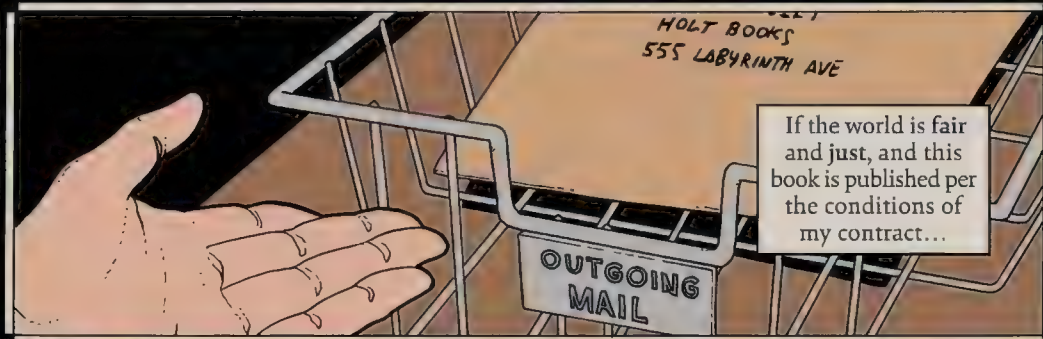


If you find this
manuscript...

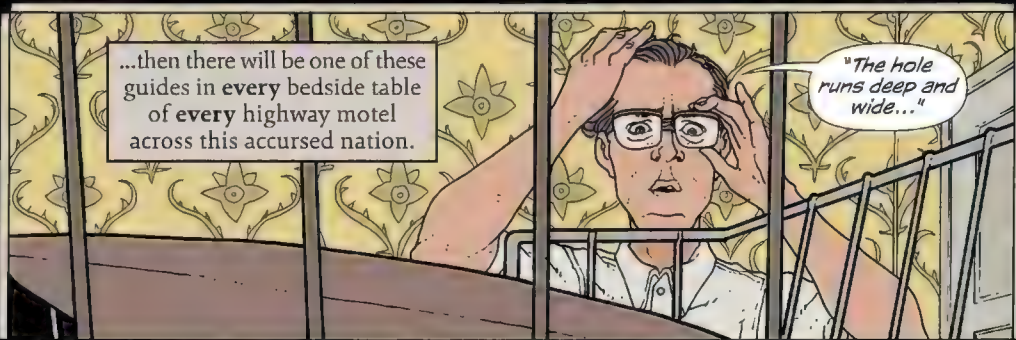
...if for some
reason it hasn't
made its way into
the postal
system...



Then please, **PLEASE** get it
to **Hobart Sweet**, Associate
Editor at **Holt Books**.




If the world is fair
and just, and this
book is published per
the conditions of
my contract...



...then there will be one of these
guides in **every** bedside table
of **every** highway motel
across this accursed nation.


"The hole
runs deep and
wide..."



A copy in every
airplane chair-back...

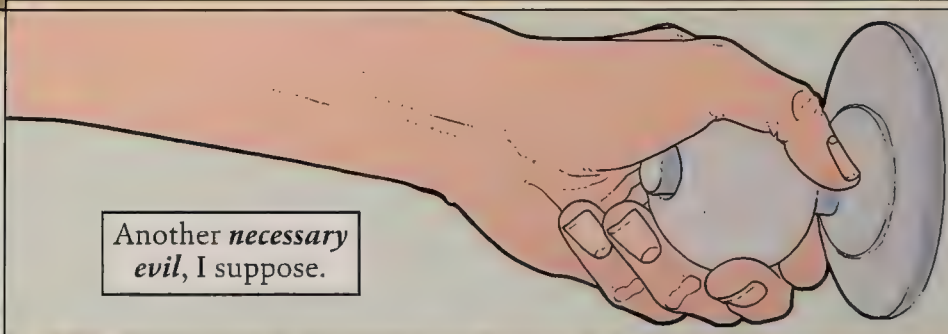
Presidents will be sworn
in on this piece of
essential reference!

But until
then:



I do solemnly **swear**
that I will faithfully
eat Linda's delicious
honey-baked ham
for dinner.

(And I can't remember if I
told you, but Jakey Jr. needs
his meat cut into small pieces,
on account of his **deformity**.)



Another *necessary*
evil, I suppose.

The Ever-Beckoning Family

Imagine it in your mind's eye. (Perhaps you already have.) A man—a *writer*, let's say—is blessed with a loving wife and child. But monsters, as is their wont, always **come home to roost**.

One evening, your wife and son are getting ready for dinner downstairs, when (quite surprisingly!) they are bitten (and thus paralyzed) by one *Phoneutria Fera*—the Brazilian Wandering Spider. The bug likely came from a collection of a hundred such bugs (the **King Spider**, remember) which had recently taken residence in your attic, up there where all the empty luggage is.

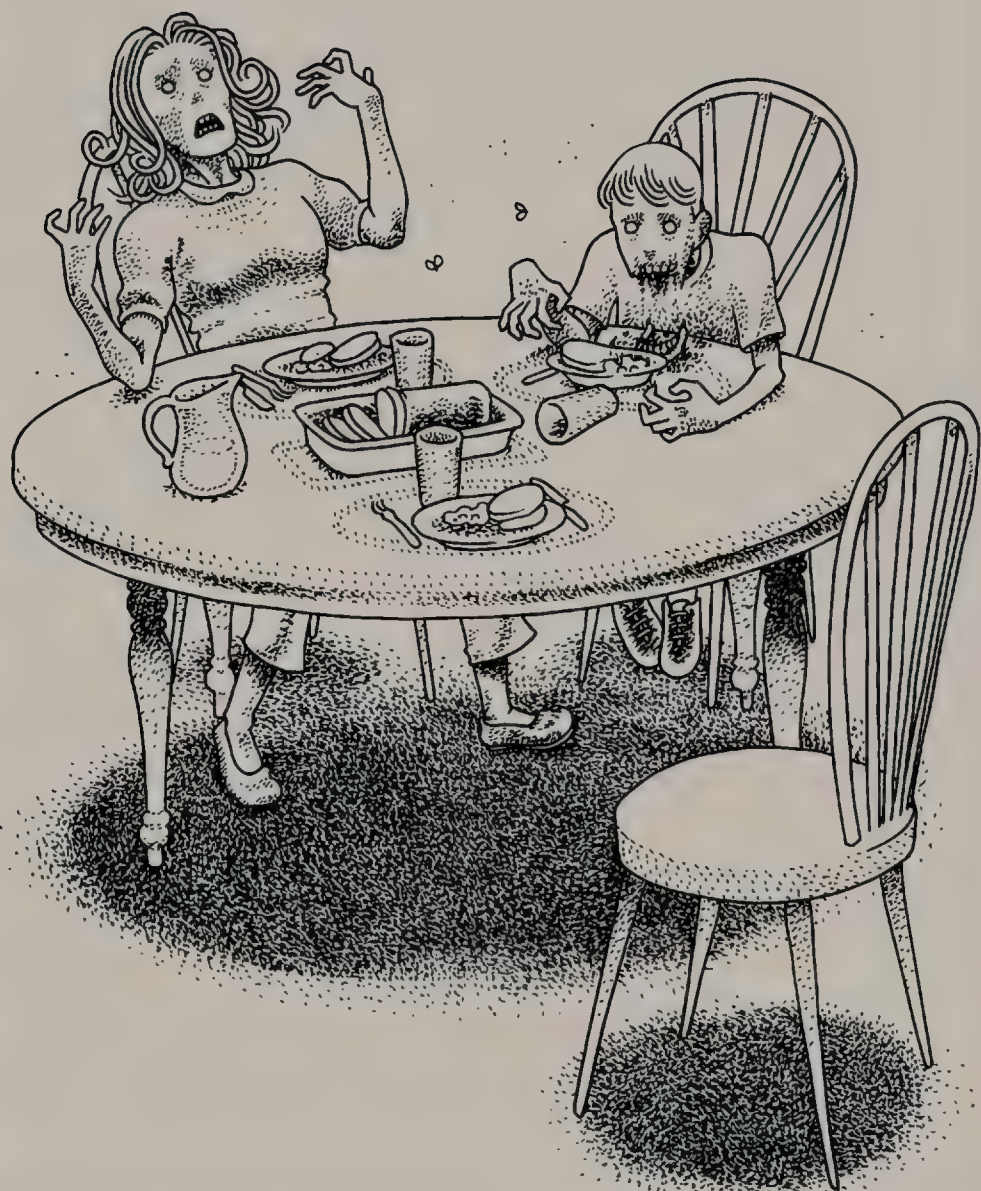
You are, of course, *grief-stricken*: your beloved family—**food for arachnids!** You had *just* begun to forgive your spouse for a long list of grievances: her *indiscretions* with the yoga instructor; the way she constantly browbeat you; how she coddled your son at every juncture, turning him into naught but a soft puddle of fleshy oatmeal. And then, suddenly, **THIS** happens.

But the thing is...“*suddenly*,” in this particular case, was actually **three weeks ago**. Which made it all the more **disconcerting** when, four nights following their deaths, your wife and child began urgently **calling** you for supper. (Your favorite meal: **honey-baked ham**.)

Now, make no mistake: Linda and young Jacob are **dead**. Rotting, right there in the kitchen. (You even took a quick look the other day, noting how your son's lower mandible had detached from its upper counterpart...) And yet...you **hear** it: *they're calling for you*.

This might seem like a **specific** problem for **this** author—dark lightning in a dirty bottle—but let me assure you: it is something you will **all** experience, in one way or another.

As for when you choose to answer the call? That's entirely up to you.






WHALE SONG




*My dearest
Amelia,*






Two and twenty days you've been gone and still I write you these useless letters in my mind.




...and still I write you these useless letters in my mind...



The wharf-folk think I've gone crazy.

...they're probably not wrong.



But what have I ever cared of these people and their little sounds?



A bucket of chum, Nate.

...like parrots who've learned to repeat a simple phrase:



You gotta
move on,
Winslow.

...she's
dead.

There's **no**
coming back from
what's out
there.



Hmf



How much
for the cherry-
wood oar?

But they didn't
see what I saw.



...They were not
witness, as I was,
to the Beast--

You can
have it for **free**,
buddy.

...to its loud, groaning
maw--full of sand and
kelp and schools of
variegated fish...



...not one of
them watched
what I watched:

Yes, you were
swallowed, my
dear child.

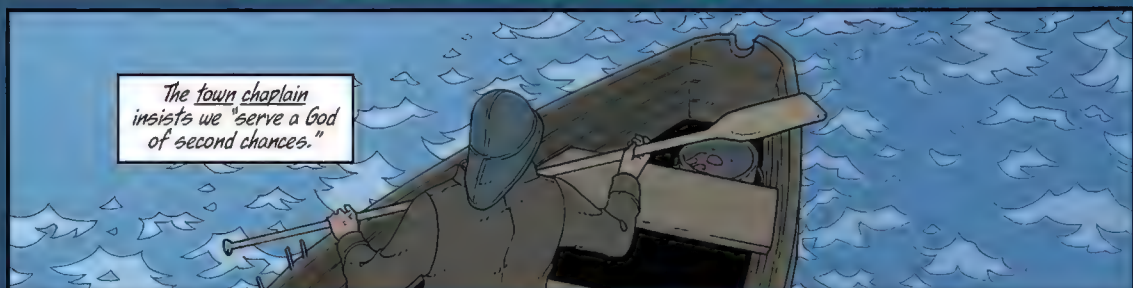
...gobbled up in
your yellow dress,
the one with the
lace trim...



*But--like Jonah in
the great book...*



*...you were
swallowed
WHOLE.*



*The town chaplain
insists we "serve a God
of second chances."*



*I believe that to be
absolutely true.*

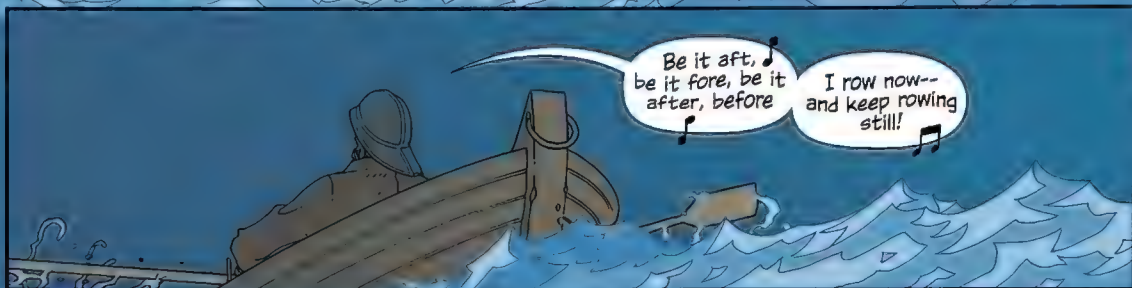


*...and so I come now to
rescue you, little girl,
from the belly of that
godforsaken whale!*



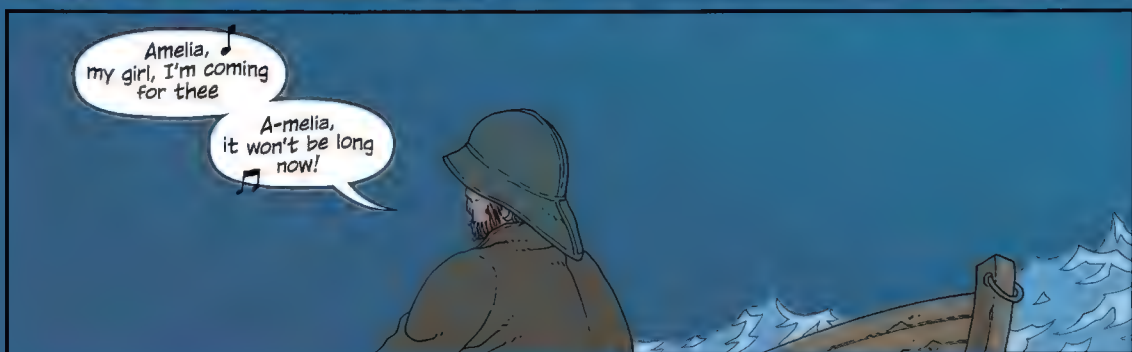
O'er the crests
and troughs, I make
way to my girl

As barnacles
spread 'cross my
bilge...



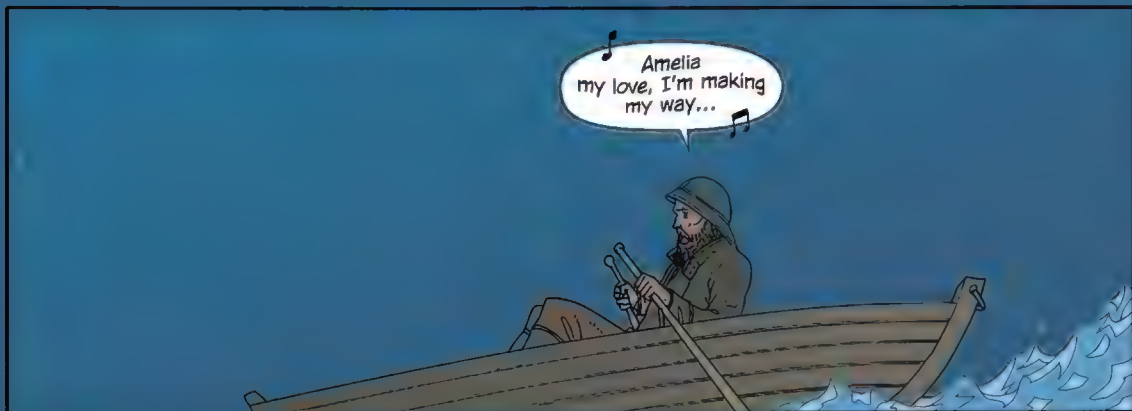
Be it aft, be it fore, be it
after, before

I row now--
and keep rowing
still!



Amelia,
my girl, I'm coming
for thee

A-melia,
it won't be long
now!

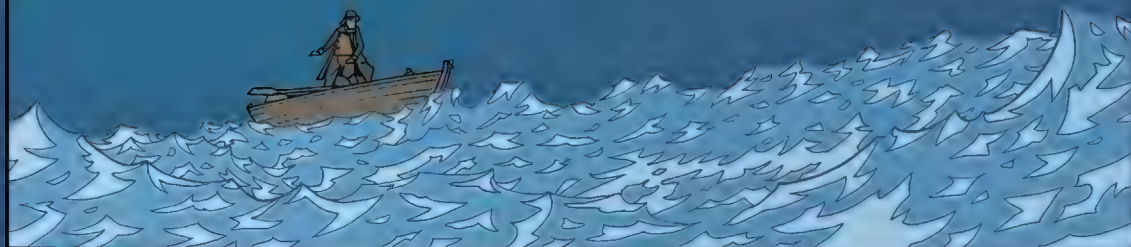


Amelia
my love, I'm making
my way...



So keep
watch for yer ol'
papa's prow...

My little angel...



*I suffer no illusions
as to the general tenor
of my fatherhood.*

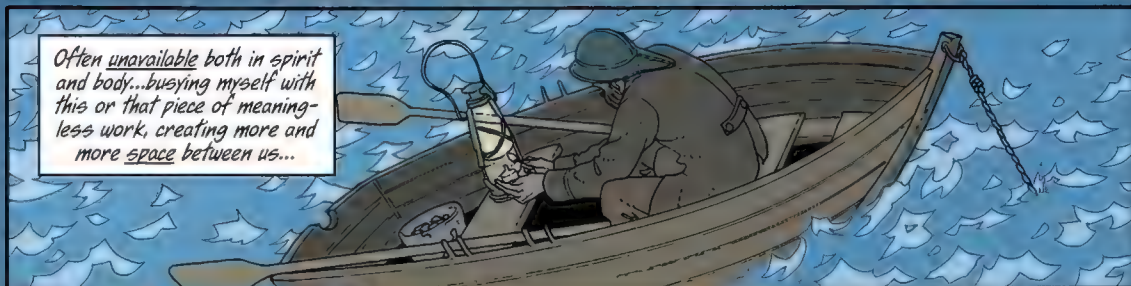
*I was, it
must be said:*



COLD.
Emotionally distant.



*Often unavailable both in spirit
and body...busying myself with
this or that piece of meaning-
less work, creating more and
more space between us...*



*And I could be mean,
too. I know that.*

*When I would holler at you,
I'd hear my own daddy's
gruff baritone issuing
directly from my mouth...*



(Though unlike him, I'd
never beat a child's hide
with a wooden spoon...)

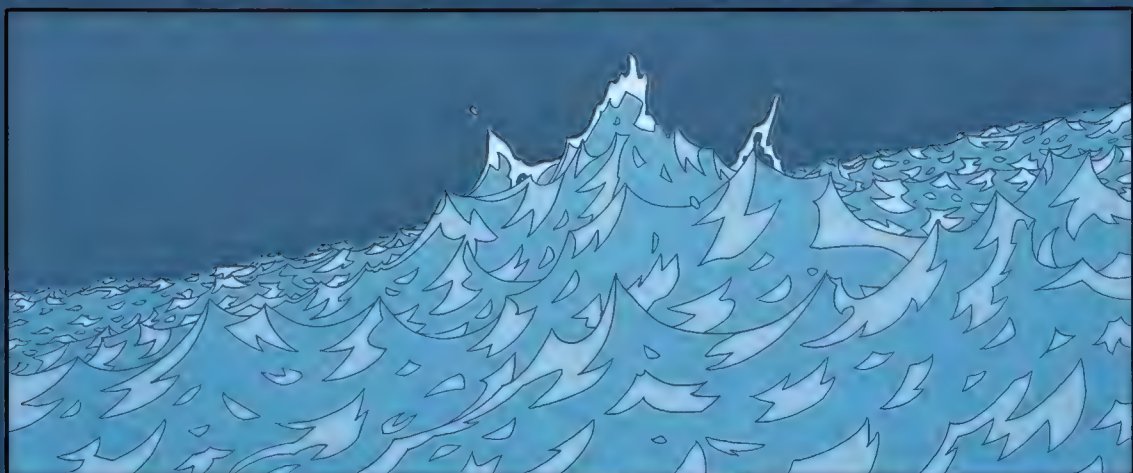
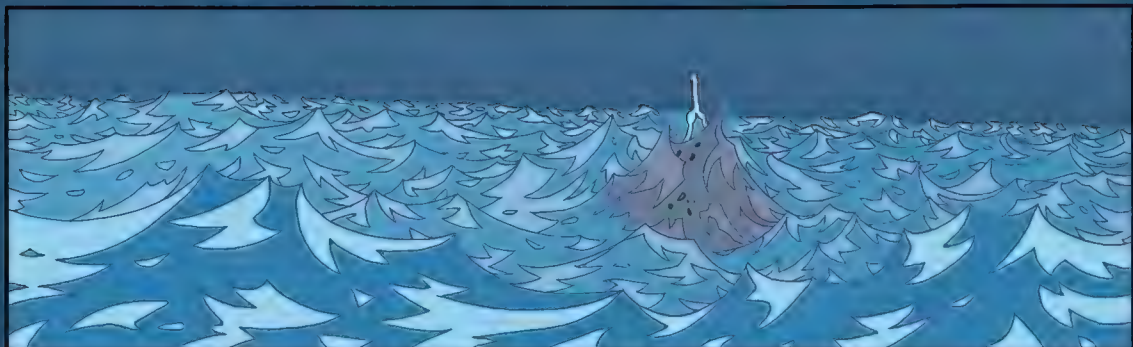
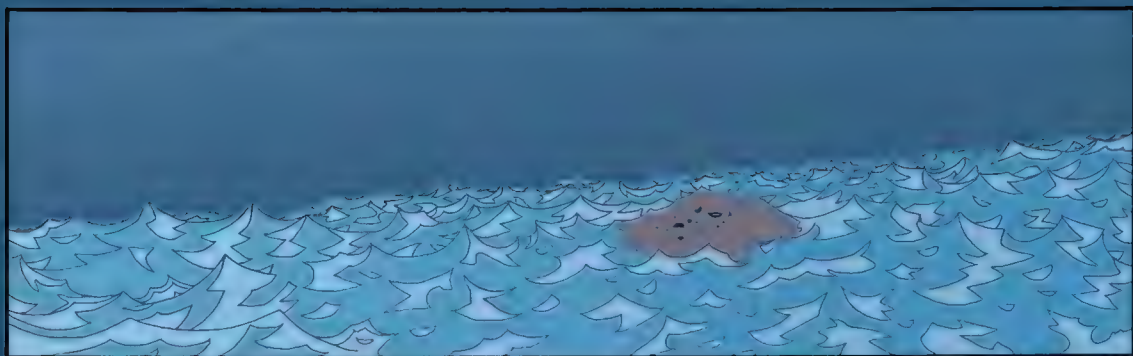
But there's more than
one way to **HURT** a
person, ain't there?


How *simple* it
all seems now.
How **CLEAR**.

You're inside
that whale,
Amelia--

--and I have to
get you **OUT**!

Show
yourself, you
overblown
guppy.

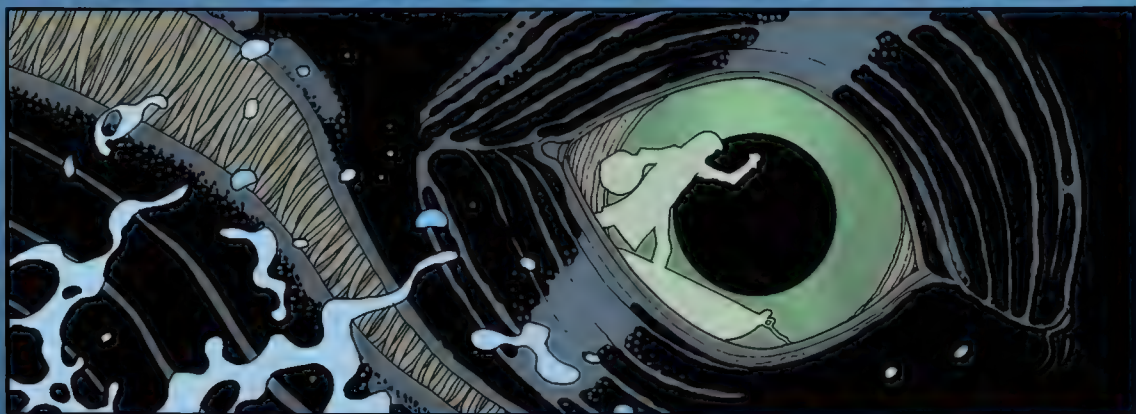


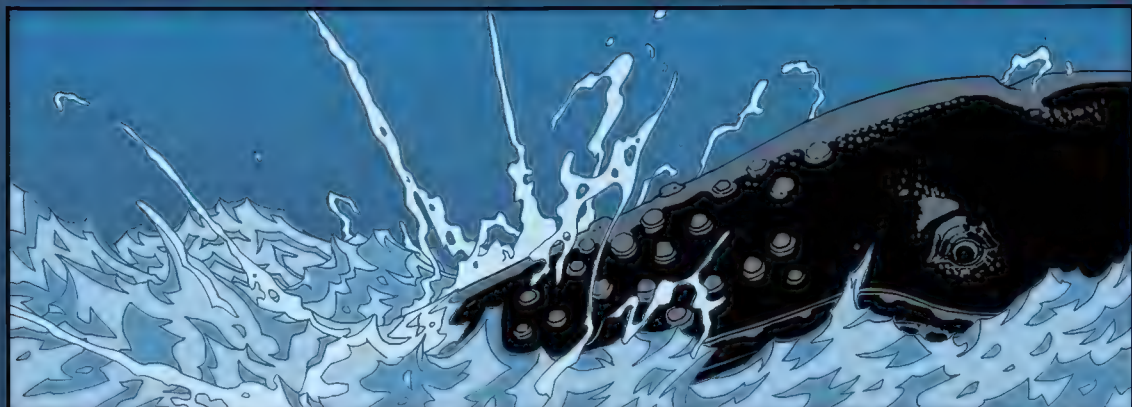
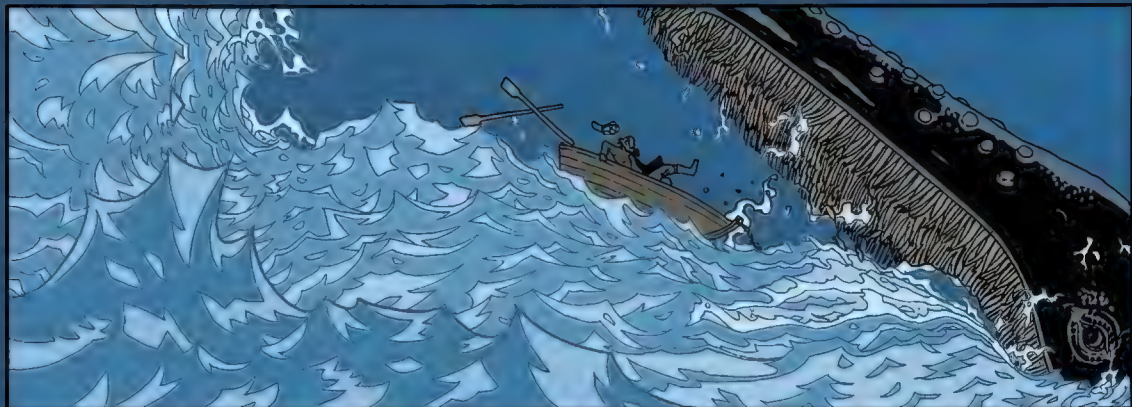
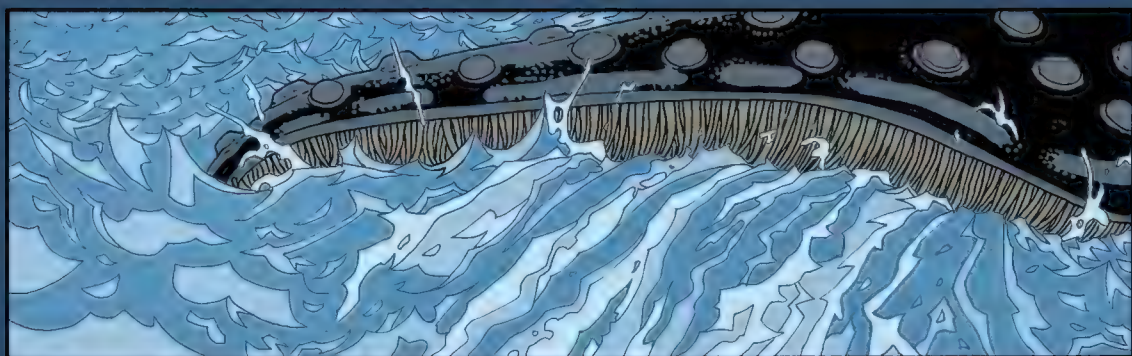
A full-page comic book illustration. In the bottom left, a man with a beard and a hat sits in a small wooden boat, holding a glowing lantern high in his right hand. He is looking up towards a massive, dark, and textured creature that dominates the right side of the frame. The creature has a long, tapering body with a rough, scaly texture and several small, white, eye-like spots. The background is a deep blue ocean with white, stylized waves and splashes. The overall tone is dramatic and mysterious.

*The world is full of
monsters both necessary
and unavoidable...*

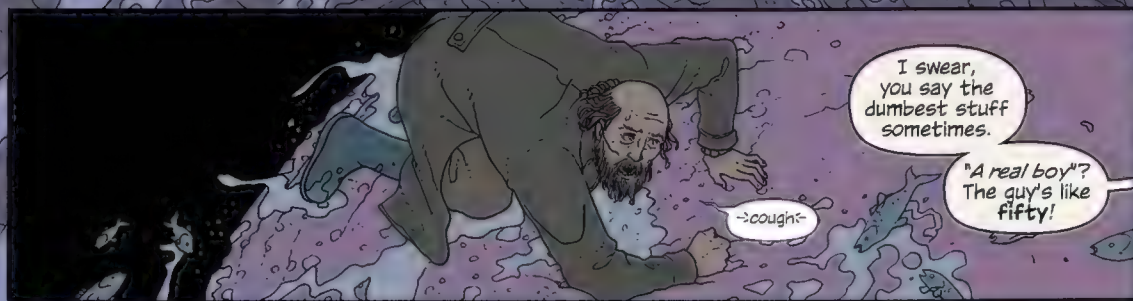
THE WHALE
(WITHIN WHICH
ARE WORLDS)







"Is he a
real boy?"



I swear,
you say the
dumbest stuff
sometimes.

-cough-

"A real boy"?
The guy's like
fifty!



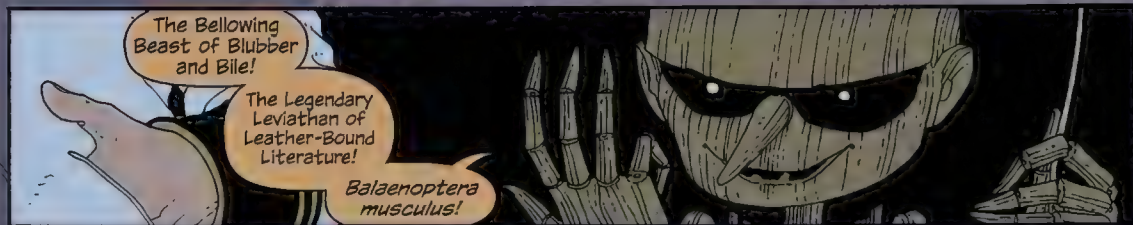
You'll have to
excuse my friend
here. His brain's
made of birch.

My cerebellum's
solid cedar, you
sunuvabitch!



Are we...
inside the
thing?

"The thing"!
You mean...



The Bellowing
Beast of Blubber
and Bile!

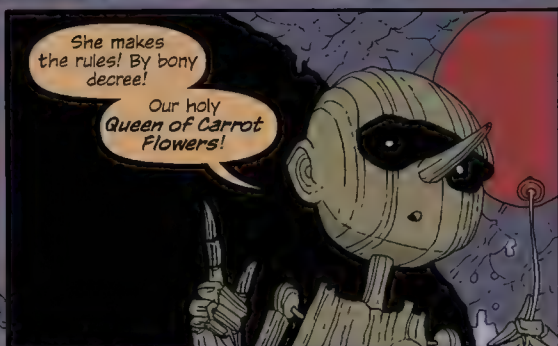
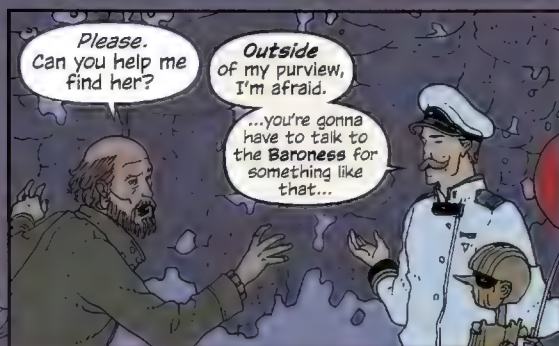
The Legendary
Leviathan of
Leather-Bound
Literature!

*Balaenoptera
musculus!*



Translated
from the wooden
tongue:

Yeah, man.
We're inside a
fucking whale.





Whole stories
gone *askew*:



A shantytown of dirty
people in bathtubs...



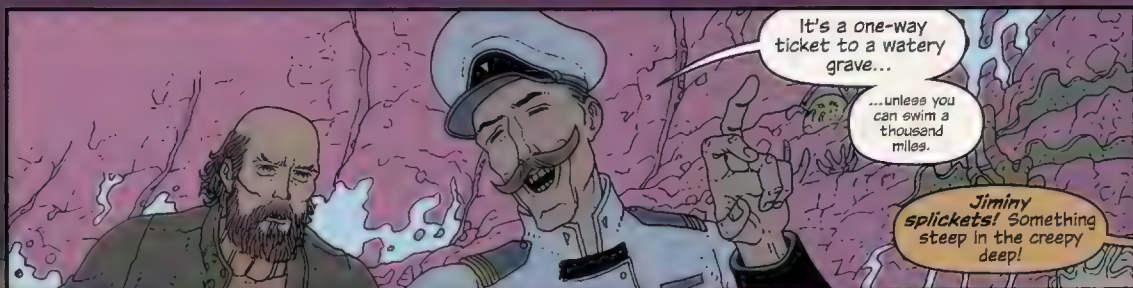
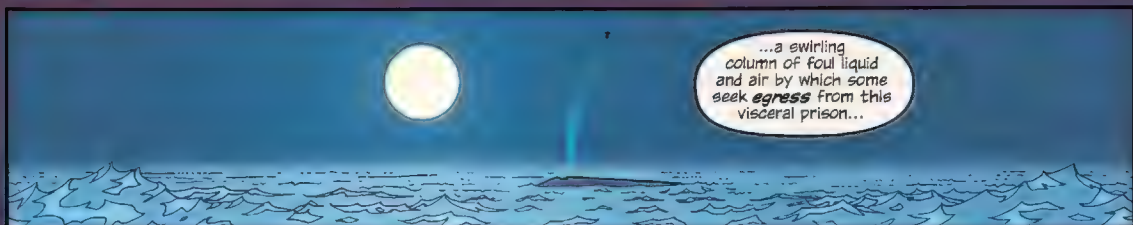
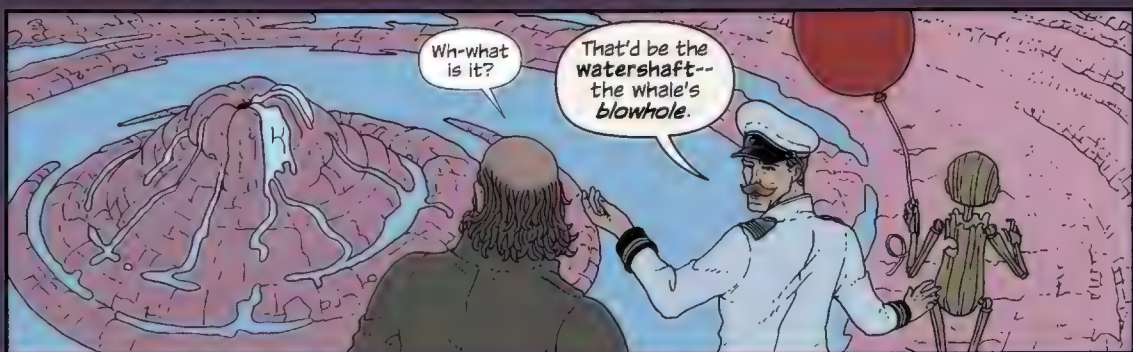
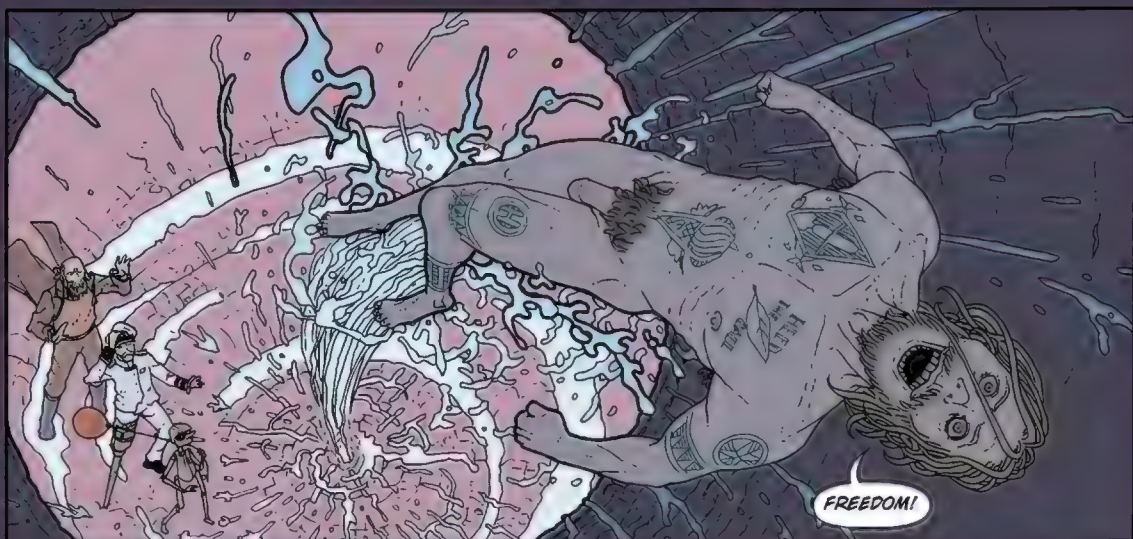
An entire industrial cruise
ship...which if I'm not
mistaken is--somehow--
the storied *Titanic*.

But the
ship is bigger
than the
fish...



Myths made
manifest.

**WATCH
OUT, MISTER!!**
Another one's about
to blow!





"Something steep in the deep."
Not so dumb after all.



Would that I could
hold you in my arms
again, dearest child.



Would that I had one
more chance to embrace
you tightly, as you so
often asked me to do...

(Why, oh why, did I
ever say "no" to such a
simple, lovely request?)

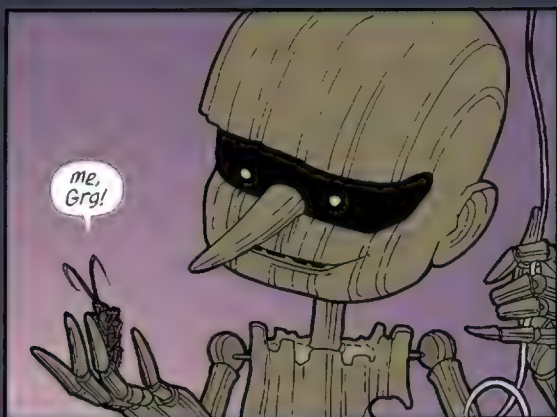
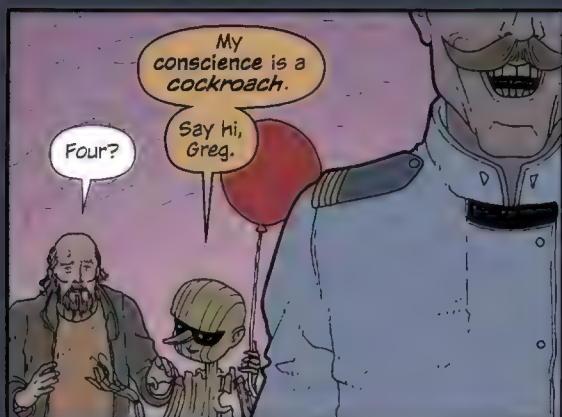


Amelia, my girl, I'm
making my way...



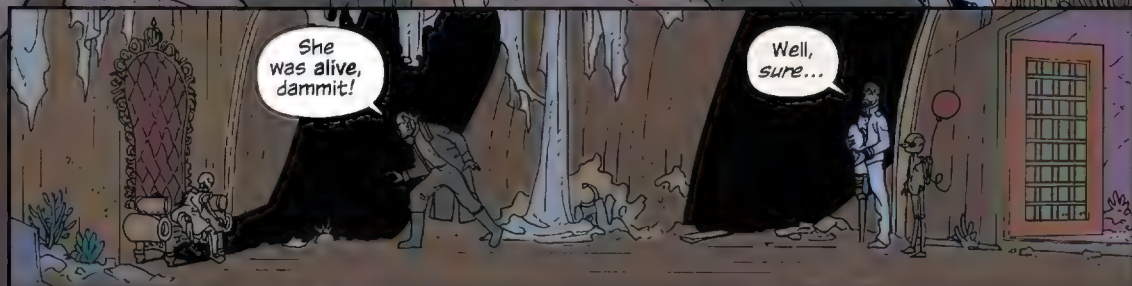
So keep watch for
yer ol' papa's prow...

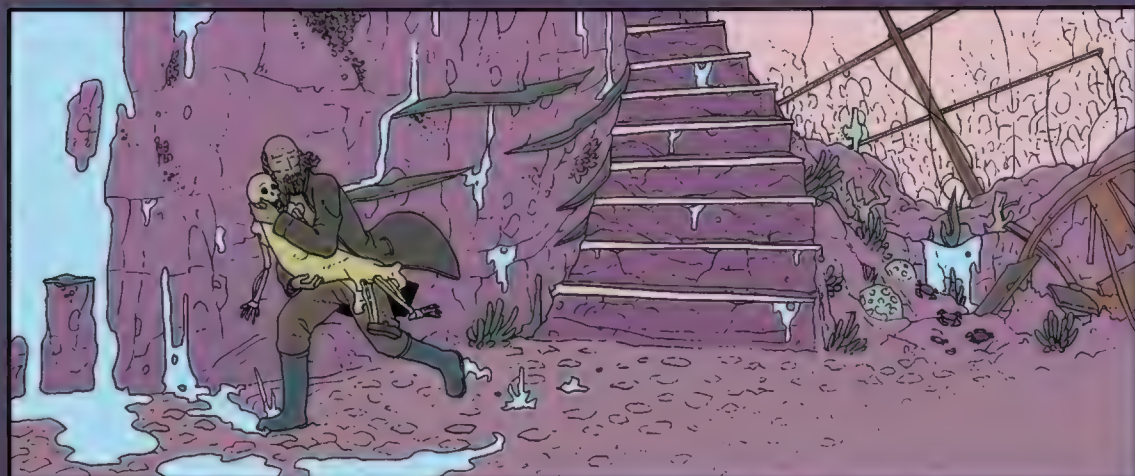
We made
it! All **four**
of us!

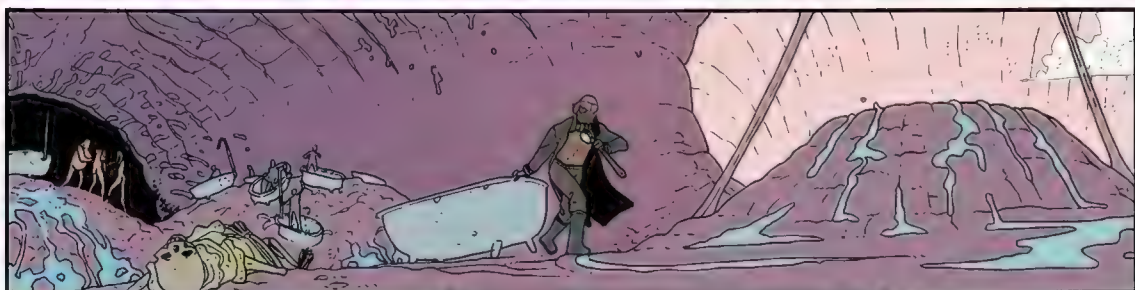
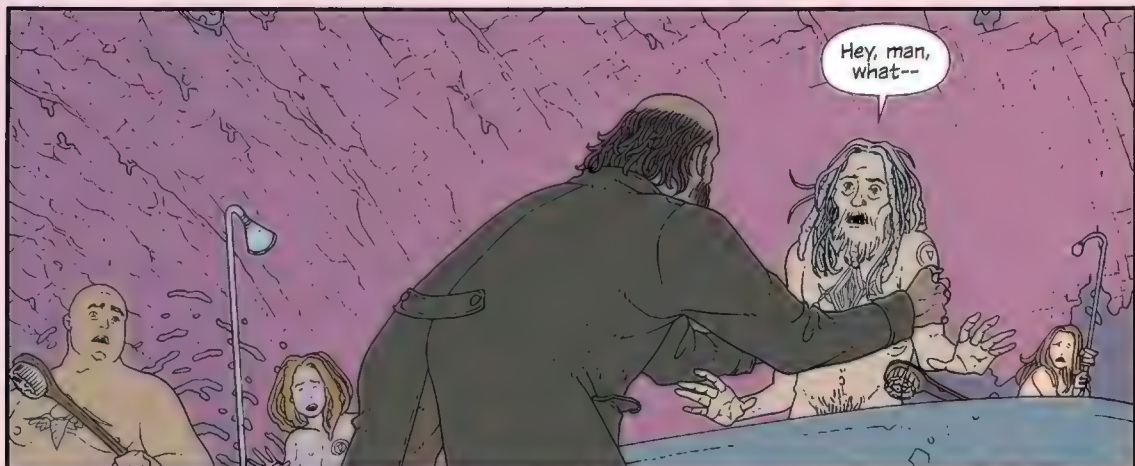
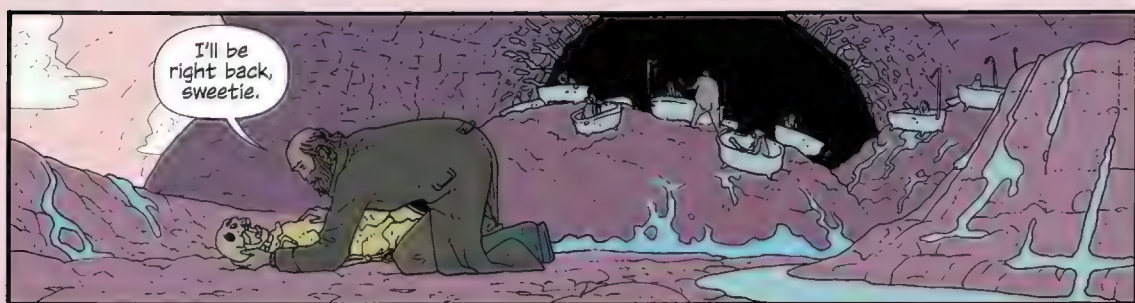


THE BONY
BARONESS
(Amelia)



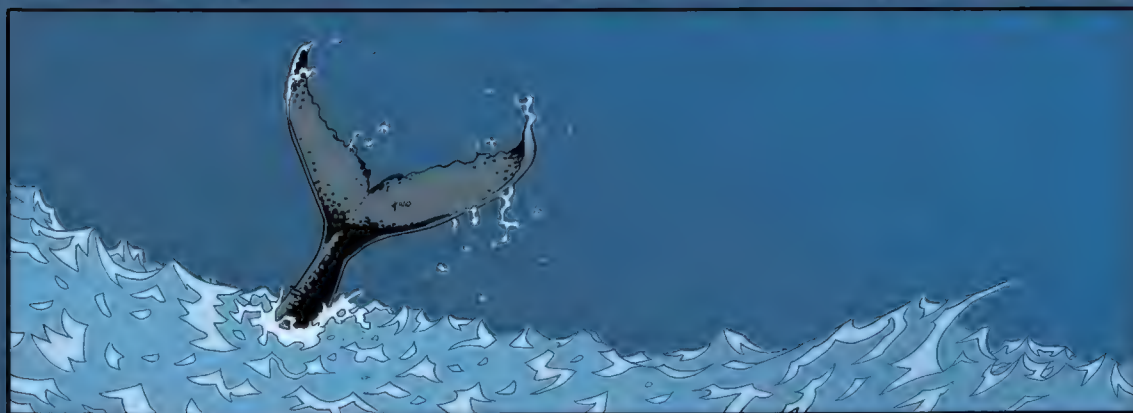
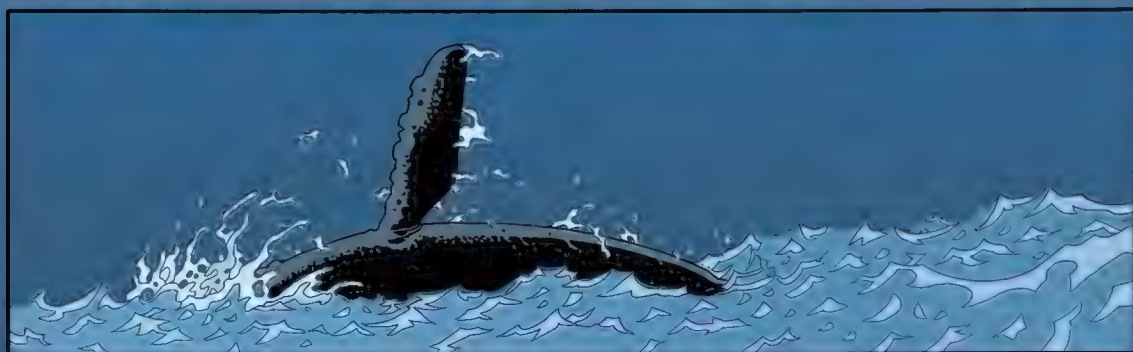
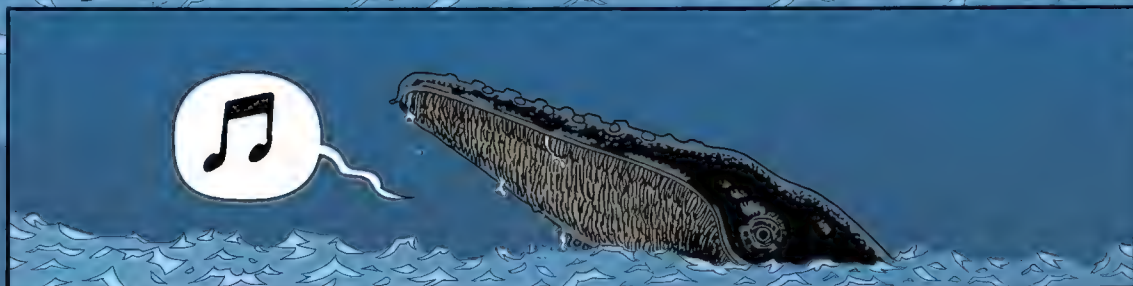
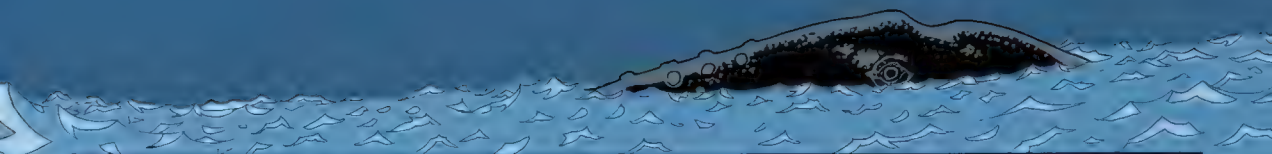




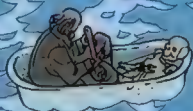








*I write you this letter (as ever,
only in my mind), hoping that
thought alone can cross the void
between the living and the dead.*



*I'm bringing us home
now--following Polaris in a
skiff of rusted porcelain...*

*...a BATHTUB from a
world inside a whale.*



*I did wrong by you,
little girl. There ain't
really another way to
say it than that.*



*...but I thought I'd
get more time to
make it all right--*

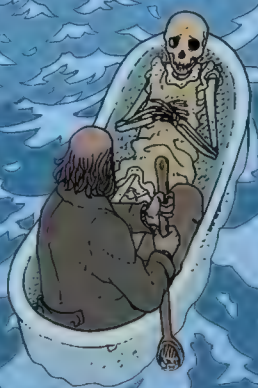


*"A God of second
chances..."*

*What a bunch
of nonsense.*

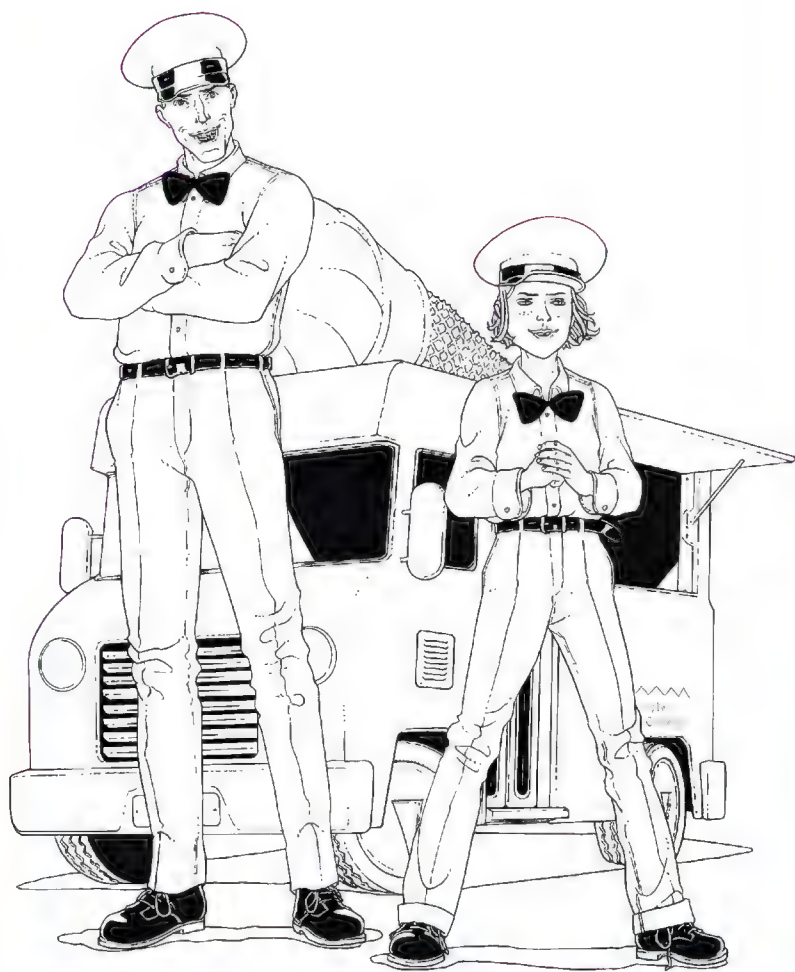
*To think! You once
asked me for a hug...*





*...and I had the
gall to say "No."*

WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING YOU EVER HEARD?



Turn the next few pages to see covers from the ninth volume of **ICE CREAM MAN**, by Jason Limon, Jana Heidersdorf, Andrew Blucha, and Jonathan Marks Barravecchia.

And look, a little extra Spawny thing from Team ICM.



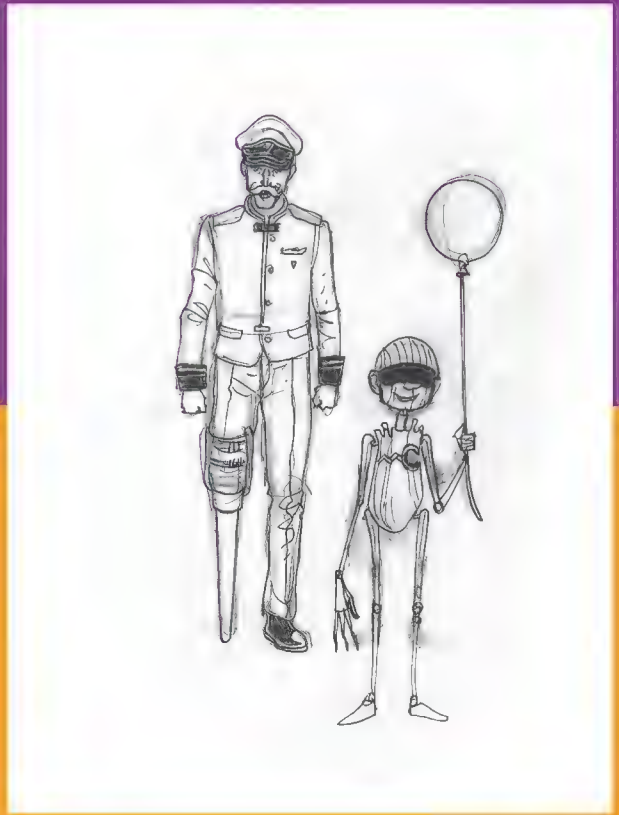
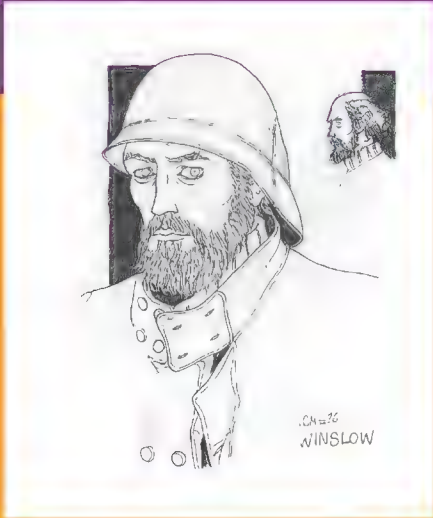
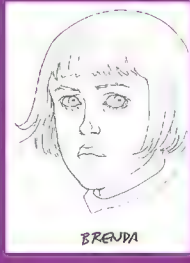
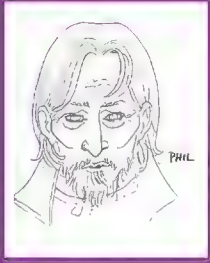
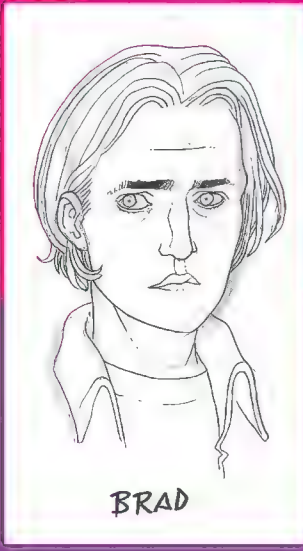






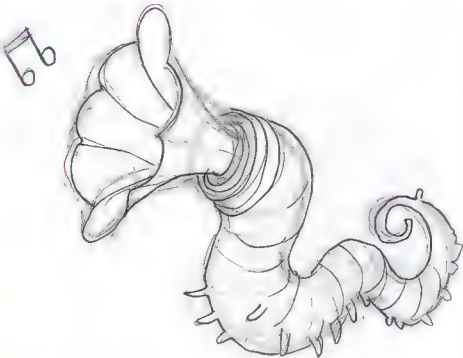
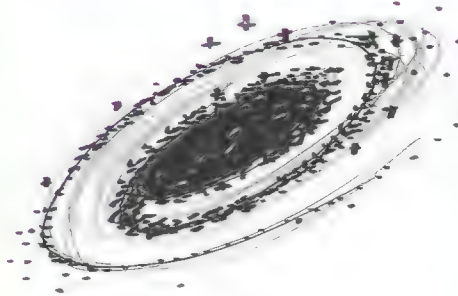


NECESSARY FACES



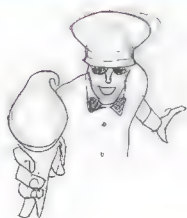
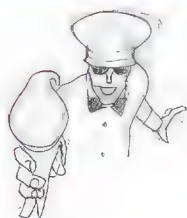
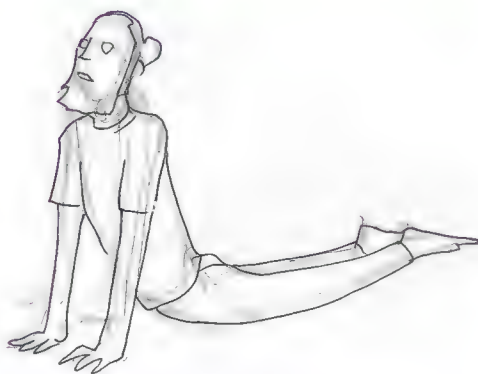
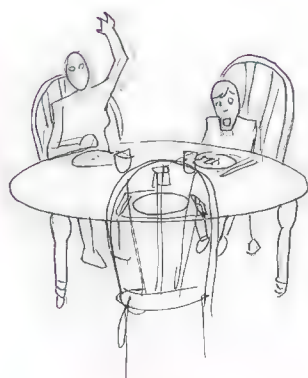
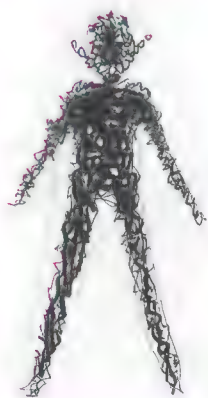
As ever, Mr. Morazzo's sketches are full of life and electricity. Above, some select character work from Chapters 33, 34 and 36. As for that 35th chapter...

NECESSARY MONSTERS



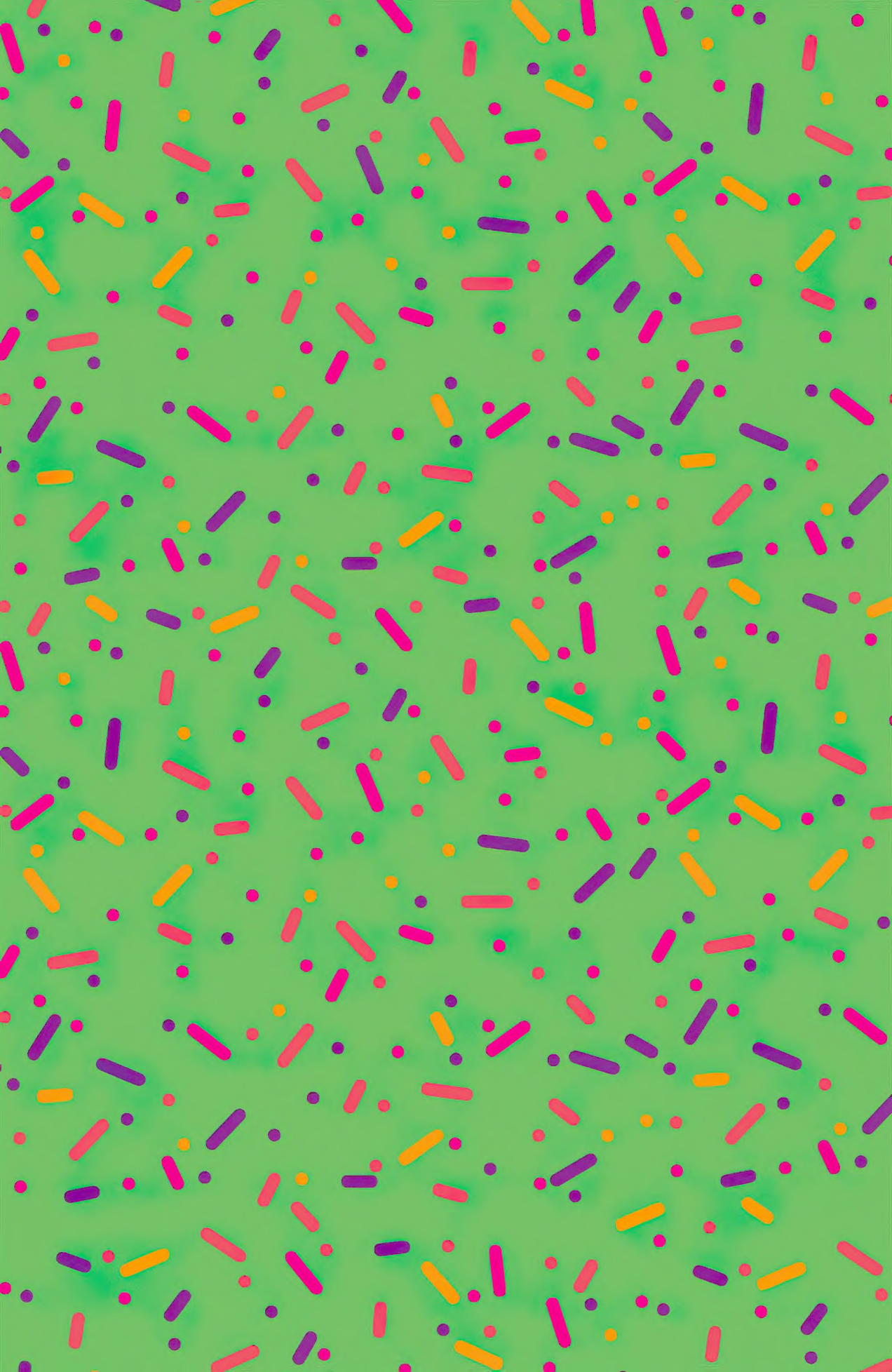
Here are the sketches for each monster in our wretched bestiary. The author **ALSO** made sketches for each monster, but they are way too embarrassing to share here.

NECESSARY MONSTERS



Watch out for that last guy!

-WMP
July 2023



The wheels on this sorry ice cream truck continue to spin round and round! Presented here, four more chilling chapters that chafe and chew at the human mind: a bifurcated tale of woe/whimsy; a small story about two unlucky tramps; a bestiary of some very necessary monsters; and a look into the big ol' belly of a whale. Please do enjoy your continued trip down this never-ending well! We'll hit the bottom eventually...

This ninth volume of ICE CREAM MAN collects issues 33-36 of the critically acclaimed horror anthology from Eisner-nominated writer **W. Maxwell Prince** (HAHA, ONE WEEK IN THE LIBRARY), artist **Martín Morazzo** (*She Could Fly*, ART BRUT), and colorist **Chris O'Halloran** (TIME BEFORE TIME, *The Punisher*).

"A perfectly bitter confection for those with a taste for short-form shockers."

— *Publishers Weekly*

"You'll never look at your double-scoop the same way again."

— *Vulture/NYMag*

"We loved it like we love mint chocolate chip ice cream, which is to say we loved it a lot."

— *Nerdist*

"Incredibly good."

— *The Oregonian*

"F*cking awesome. The writing is strange and deeply unsettling, and the artwork is gorgeous."

— *Brian K. Vaughan*

(SAGA, PAPER GIRLS)

"You'll want a scoop of this comic because we're in for a treat."

— *Geek.com*

"Will have you questioning everything."

— *Amazon Book Review*



Horror
Rated **M** / Mature
Collects ICE CREAM MAN 33-36

DR. VINK

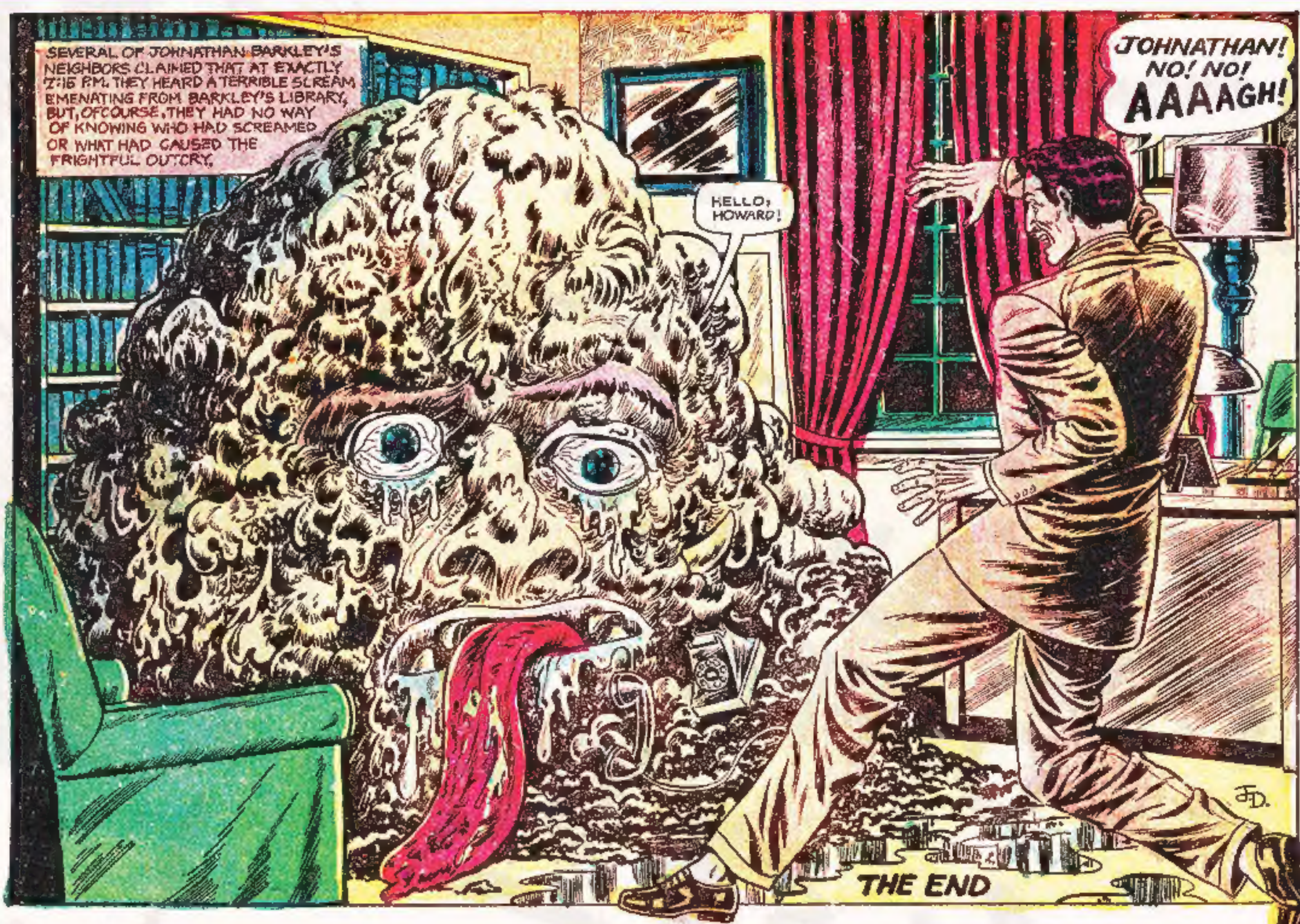
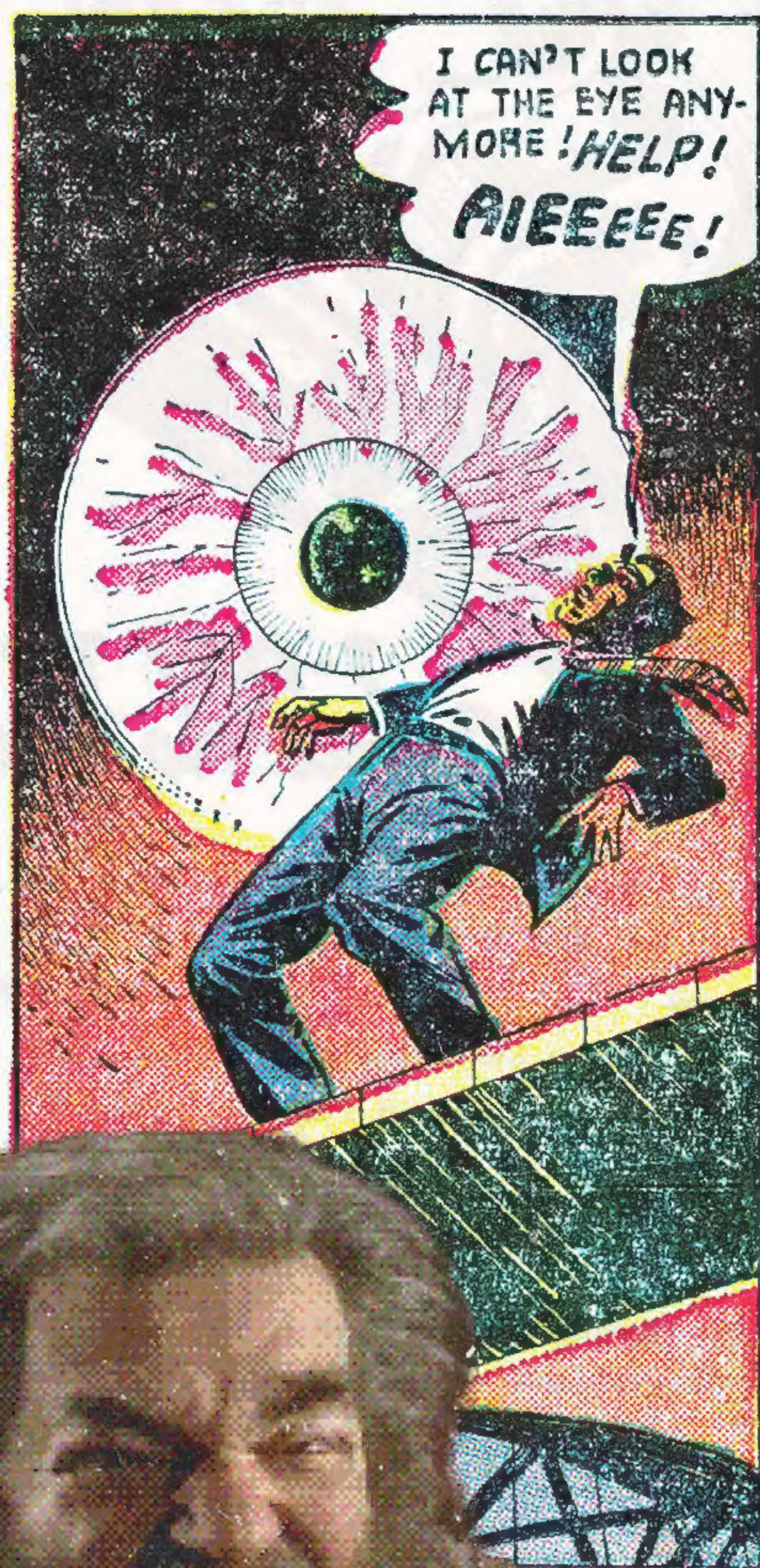
WITH A VA-VA-VA

A DR. VINK POOR MAN'S RIP

~ RIPPIN POORLY SINCE MAY 2022 ~

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...AND I AM NOT A NUT BAG



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